

# **WESTERN EUROPEAN NUCLEAR FORCES**

*a British, a French, and an American View*

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**Project AIR FORCE**

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Prepared for the  
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## PREFACE

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This report on the future of the British and French nuclear forces is the product of a small study that began with an invitation to Nick Witney of the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense to spend a year, beginning in the summer of 1993, participating in research and policy analysis at RAND in Santa Monica. Mr. Witney, whose Ministry of Defense positions have included staff responsibilities related to the British nuclear force, chose to focus his analysis on the future of that force. In March 1994, RAND invited Olivier Debouzy to Santa Monica for several weeks to work with Mr. Witney and others on issues relating to the two West European nuclear forces. M. Debouzy, currently an attorney in Paris, has been a staff member of the French Atomic Energy Agency, is concerned with military matters, and is an advisor to the Agency. The RAND staff monitor and participant in the study was Robert Levine, who was codirector of the Carnegie Corporation-sponsored RAND project on "Avoiding Nuclear War" and has written extensively on nuclear deterrence.

The three resulting papers are related to one another—both because they are based in part on intensive discussions during M. Debouzy's Santa Monica visit and because each of the authors has reviewed and commented on the other papers—but each paper can be read independently. Each of them presents the views of its author; none in any way purports to represent official policy.

The work has been supported by RAND corporate funds and by Project AIR FORCE. The report is intended to be of use not only to those making decisions about British and French nuclear posture,

but also to U.S. military and civilian policymakers concerned with such decisions on the part of America's closest allies, as well as those concerned more generally with the future nuclear shape of the world.

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## SUMMARY

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Each of the three papers that make up this report focuses on the question: What is the best rationale for the continued existence of the West European—British and French—nuclear forces in the post-cold war period? The three analyses are not symmetrical. The British and French papers discuss the specifics of their own forces, and in doing so come up with similar rationales, each of which invokes what both papers term a “European Vocation” for the two forces operating in increasingly close cooperation with one another. The American paper is based on a view of U.S. interests in these forces which values their retention but questions the European Vocation as the primary premise.

The three papers share a common structure, each providing a description of the past—the French paper with a more thoroughgoing description of a more complex past—as a basis for examining future alternatives. They also share the premise that it is in the *real* interests of not only Britain and France, but also of the United States and of international stability, that the British and French retain their forces. That is why the central issue throughout the report is not the real need, but rather the *rationale* for the forces, the set of arguments that will convince the electorates of the two countries that their real interests dictate retention of their nuclear forces.

The three chapters of the report are:

### **THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT—A EUROPEAN VOCATION?**

**Nicholas Witney**

This chapter reviews the history of the British nuclear force, which from the beginning was dedicated to NATO, with only an escape clause for independent British interests. With the end of NATO's original cold war mission, however, the need for the force is thrown into question. Current nuclear philosophies tend to one of two poles. Nuclear weapons are considered by some (including, according to the chapter, most Americans) to be an "Unmitigated Evil" (UE), whose only function is to make itself disappear, however long it may take to reach that goal. Others, however, believe the weapons to be a "Blessing in Disguise" (BD), whose existence and potential use *in extremis* stabilize the world against a Pandora's Box of other evils, including other weapons of mass destruction. The chapter takes the latter view, and thus searches for a rationale that can preserve the political basis for British nuclear forces' having this mission.

Rejecting several other alternatives, the chapter concludes that even after the end of the cold war, the European Vocation continues to provide the most robust rationale. It therefore explores means of reinvigorating that mission, in which British nuclear forces together with the French would provide a deterrent protecting all of Europe. The author discusses the limits on cooperation with France—constraining in such areas as warhead design, but generally quite broad; the need to satisfy the United States so as to maintain the viability of NATO; and questions that the Germans may raise about their non-nuclear role in sharing the direction as well as the benefits of the European Vocation.

### **A EUROPEAN VOCATION FOR THE FRENCH NUCLEAR DETERRENT**

**Olivier Debouzy**

The 1994 French White Paper on Defense marked the first significant turn away from traditional Gaullist nuclear doctrines, but, this analysis argues, the turn was not sharp enough. For General de Gaulle, the

*force de frappe* had one overwhelming objective—to establish and protect French independence in world affairs. This meant establishing it outside of NATO, unlike the British force, in order to keep France independent of the United States; it meant an independent deterrent of Soviet action against Europe; and it was intended to mean an equal voice in world affairs with other nuclear powers. The nuclear force also contributed by becoming the central focus of the internal French consensus on defense. All this required a stated policy of *tous azimuts*—nuclear weapons which could be pointed in any direction, although the French, their allies, and their enemies all knew that the only real threat was from the East.

*Tous azimuts* had fallen into disuse after the end of the de Gaulle regime, but the White Paper revived it in a different way by admitting the end of the specific threat from the East and discussing nuclear forces as a deterrent/defense against a wider spectrum of lesser threats, including regional ones. However, this analysis suggests that in deference to President Mitterrand, who in recent years had become increasingly Gaullist in his defense policies, the White Paper pulled its punches. In particular, it still included many of the traditional formulas about French independence.

The analysis argues for a substantial abandonment of nuclear independence, substituting greatly increased cooperation with the British, built around the European Vocation. Like the British paper, it explores the technical limits of French/British cooperation, the importance of keeping within a NATO context, and the need for bringing in the Germans and the difficulties in doing so. The French paper goes further, however, in advocating the use of these new nuclear policies to reconstruct both the Atlantic and the European political as well as military alliances on firmer bases.

## AN AMERICAN VIEW

**Robert Levine**

The American chapter reviews the initial lack of enthusiasm by the Kennedy administration and its advisors for British and French nuclear forces. In the early 1960s, many American experts feared that those forces would be militarily destabilizing. As the British and French forces developed over that decade and the subsequent ones,

however, the United States recognized that nuclear forces were contributing to stability, and were perhaps even useful to the Atlantic Alliance and to the United States, at least politically, although American skepticism regarding their military utility continued.

In the post-cold war world, the central question for the United States remains: Where will these forces fall in the range of destabilizing/stabilizing/useful to U.S. interests? The chapter suggests that the U.S. interest most relevant to nuclear weapons is nuclear stability itself, including control over proliferation, an interest shared by the British and the French. Continuation of the European forces should be considered useful for this joint interest.

The central concern of the American paper, however, is with the rationales in each of the two European countries for continuation of their nuclear forces. The concern is not a strong one, because the paper suggests that with the major decisions already made and the costs for a substantial time period already incurred, inertia is likely to keep the forces in existence in any case. Little opposition is manifest any longer in Britain; in France there never was much. This makes it tempting to continue to depend on inertia, either by not talking about new rationales or by explicitly rationalizing nuclear forces as a hedge against general worldwide uncertainty. Another option may be to design a more specific worldwide rationale: the paper suggests a joint policy by the United States, Britain, and France, and, if possible, Russia and China as well, to punish any first use of nuclear weapons. This may not be politically viable, however; perhaps a looser specific worldwide function can be substituted.

The American paper questions the European Vocation, as compared to the worldwide one, on the grounds that it is difficult to discover threats to Europe for which nuclear deterrence is relevant. The American critique suggests that the case made for the European Vocation by the British and French papers focuses on the utility of the Vocation for the internal cohesion of the European Union and indeed NATO, but has little to say about the external military functions of these military forces. For that reason, the paper fears, the British and/or French electorates might some day discover that these still-expensive military capabilities no longer have any real military functions, and might decide to do away with them.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**THE BRITISH NUCLEAR DETERRENT—A  
EUROPEAN VOCATION?**

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Nicholas Witney

**WANTED—A REFURBISHED RATIONALE**

First, a point of clarification for fans of Chevy Chase movies. What is at issue in the title of this piece is not a disastrous Griswald family holiday on the old continent. “A European Vocation” is (or would be) a role or mission connected with, or perhaps in support of or contributing toward, the building of “Europe” as a political, geo-strategic entity. The concept—and the vocabulary—is more Gaelic than British: it connotes vision and commitment, and the acceptance of the goal of some more integrated Europe—none of which sits easily with British temperament and instincts. But the meaning of the question, at least, is clear: can, or should, the British nuclear deterrent be presented and seen as an instrument of collective European, as distinct from national or even Alliance, policy?

Why does the question arise at all? Because it was placed on the political agenda by President Mitterand. More fundamentally, because both British and French nuclear deterrents face the same crisis of post-cold war identity. The old rationales that sustained the deterrents since their inception have been largely overtaken by the evaporation of the Soviet threat to Western Europe. There is a widespread feeling that a redefinition of their role in international security affairs is required—a rejustification of their existence. Absent the definition of such a new (or at least refurbished) vocation, European or otherwise, their indefinite continuation may no longer be assured.

At first sight, this view may seem exaggerated. Indeed, the future of the UK nuclear deterrent might seem comfortably assured for at least the foreseeable future. The Trident program (for the replacement of

the aging four-boat Polaris ballistic-missile submarine force with a four-boat Trident force) is coming to fruition, with Vanguard, the first of the new boat class, entering service at the end of 1994. The new force should be more than capable of sustaining a credible UK deterrent through at least the first quarter of the twenty-first century. True, were the decision to be taken today, it may be doubted whether the British government would be prepared to accept the program's price tag of some \$15 billion (much the same as the cost of the Channel Tunnel). But, in consequence of the lead time required by such a technically complex acquisition, the commitment was made as long ago as 1980. All four hulls are now on contract—indeed, in varying degrees already built; and nearly 90 percent<sup>1</sup> of the overall costs have now been spent or committed. The force's operating costs (estimated over an assumed 30-year life at about \$300 million annually, inclusive of refit and decommissioning costs) seem unlikely to provide decisive incentive to future governments to do other than run the force on.

The fact that it has been technically successful and is now largely paid for constitutes one reason for supposing that the Trident program will continue without serious domestic controversy. The second is the unusual consensus now prevailing among the three major UK political parties on the proposition that Britain should keep nuclear weapons "as long as other countries possess them."<sup>2</sup> It may seem odd that the Labour party (or at any rate its leadership) should have arrived at this rejection of unilateral nuclear disarmament at just the time when the Soviet threat, the main plank in the nuclear proponents' argument, had disappeared. No doubt the perception that unilateralist policies had contributed significantly to the general election defeats of 1983 and 1987 was an important motive for this change of stance. In all events, it has left the major parties in agreement on continuing with Trident (albeit with different views on how many warheads the force need deploy).

Internationally, too, the UK's evident intention to maintain its position as a nuclear-weapon state (NWS) does not seem a cause of par-

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<sup>1</sup>It was 86.8 percent, as of June 1994; see House of Commons Official Report (Hansard), 27 October 1994, Vol. 248, col. 73.

<sup>2</sup>*Labour Party Policy Briefing Handbook*, February 1992.



ticular difficulty. True, the imminence of the 1995 conference at which the international community is to decide whether and for how long the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should be extended has increased pressure on the UK, like the other recognized NWS, to demonstrate that it is living up to its commitment to pursue “effective measures relating to . . . nuclear disarmament” (Article VI of the Treaty). The UK acquisition of Trident, with its greater capability compared with the Polaris force that it will replace, has been criticized on these grounds (and contrasted with the START [Strategic Arms Reduction Talks] agreements reached by the superpowers). But the British government can in its turn point to a series of other nuclear divestments announced since the end of the cold war: the scrapping of NATO dual-key systems (Lance, tube artillery, and depth bombs) in company with the rest of the Alliance; the halving of Britain’s own stockpile of WE177 nuclear gravity bombs; the giving up in their entirety of the maritime tactical weapon capabilities; and finally the decision not to plan for any replacement for the remaining WE177 bombs when they expire early in the next century—thus foreshadowing a time when the UK’s nuclear capability is vested in the Trident force alone.

Beyond that, in November 1993, the British Defense Secretary sought to draw the sting of the perceived escalation of capability that Trident could represent by affirming that no more than 96 warheads would be deployed per boat—more admittedly than the number associated with Polaris (to which Labour and Liberal Democrat parties argue that Trident numbers should be held), but only half the system’s technical capacity. Adopting at the same time more forthcoming positions on the proposals for a Comprehensive Test Ban (CTB) and a cutoff in production in fissile material for explosive purposes, the British government seemed to be keeping themselves well to windward of any serious international difficulties over their determination to maintain Britain’s “minimum deterrent.”

So far, then, so good. But a strong tactical position may mask a weak strategic one; and the absence of a near-term challenge to Britain’s continued possession of an independent nuclear deterrent should not be confused with a secure foundation, political and intellectual, for the future. Indeed, the end of the cold war has significantly eroded the ground upon which that capability has traditionally been based.

The traditional British rationale for its nuclear deterrent has been its contribution to the NATO Alliance. In part, this has reflected the requirements of two crucial areas of technical cooperation with the United States. Cooperation on nuclear warheads (involving exchange of information, equipment, and material) takes place under the aegis of the 1958 U.S./UK Agreement for Cooperation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defense Purposes, which assumes participation by both parties “in an international arrangement for their mutual defense and security.” Similarly, the supply of first Polaris and subsequently Trident missiles by the United States was agreed on the basis that “except where Her Majesty’s Government may decide that supreme national interests are at stake, these British forces will be used for the purposes of international defense of the Western Alliance in all circumstances.”<sup>3</sup>

These stipulations explain why the UK’s submarine strategic deterrent force has always been assigned to NATO, and targeted in accordance with the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). They do not explain why Britain should have similarly assigned the rest of its nuclear forces, including the home-grown WE177 bomb component, as well. In truth, Britain, in contrast to France, has never felt comfortable with a nationalistic rationale for its deterrent. It has preferred to represent it as a capability maintained essentially at the service of the wider Alliance—allowing domestic criticism to be deflected by reference to international support and positioning the UK deterrent as something which nonnuclear allies should regard with appreciation rather than resentment.

Crucial, however, to sustaining such a case was an intelligent concept of *how* this British contribution to collective Alliance security was meant to work. The UK deterrent might, after all, be dismissed as an irrelevancy beside U.S. strategic power. The answer was provided by the “second center of decisionmaking” theory—the concept of the UK deterrent as the plug in a potential credibility gap affecting the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Europe. An aggressive Soviet leadership might be tempted to gamble that, when the chips were down, the United States would not be prepared to resort to strategic nuclear

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<sup>3</sup>See the Nassau Communiqué issued by President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan following their December 1962 meeting, at which the sale of Polaris missiles to the UK was agreed upon.

exchange in defense of Europe. But it would also have to persuade itself similarly to discount nuclear reaction from Britain (and France) before it reckoned the way clear for aggression against Western Europe. The existence of independent deterrent forces under the control of European nations—and in the British case explicitly committed to an extended deterrence role—was held to complicate Soviet risk calculus, and thus reinforce deterrence.

This was a satisfying account, not only because it invested the UK deterrent with an aura of altruism, but because it associated it with the morally robust NATO strategy of war prevention and tied it to a particular set of geostrategic circumstances—preventing proliferators from borrowing the justification. But the disappearance of that set of circumstances has now collapsed this particular rationale. The idea of the UK deterrent giving pause to Kremlin hawks otherwise poised for attack across the inter-German border belongs, like that border, to a bygone era.

The fullest attempt to date to re-account for the British deterrent in the post-cold war era was set out in a speech<sup>4</sup> by the British Defense Secretary in November 1993 (to which we have already referred). The old Soviet threat may have disappeared, but “Russia will remain the pre-eminent military power in Europe. She will retain very substantial military forces, and will continue to be a nuclear superpower. . . . In the circumstances, decisions about our own future force structures and postures should take into careful account what has proved hitherto to be successful in maintaining stability in the presence of Russia’s military strength.” NATO’s nuclear weapons kept the peace through the cold war: it would be irresponsible to take chances with the preconditions for that peace now. “Having achieved a stable and secure system of war-prevention in the Cold War context, we should be in no hurry to throw away the benefits.”

This conservative line of argument may be the best currently available to defenders of the UK deterrent. It may be realistic. But it is scarcely compelling. It identifies no specific niche for the British capability to occupy, and it provides no clear definition of that capability’s particular “value-added.” It has had less resonance in

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<sup>4</sup>Speech at Centre for Defence Studies, King’s College, London, 16 November 1993.

the public mind than talk of partnerships with erstwhile foes and the symbolic detargeting of nuclear missiles. Those who offered their deterrent power to protect nonnuclear allies from a palpable threat could hope for a degree of respect, perhaps even gratitude, which those who characterize their mission as “preserving stability” cannot realistically expect.

In current circumstances, as described above, this weakening of the rationale hardly matters. There is little friction, either international or domestic, that needs to be overcome in keeping the UK nuclear deterrent, and especially the Trident program, on its planned course. Although inertia currently works in favor of retention of the British nuclear capability, this will not hold true indefinitely. Even if no particular effort of will, or commitment of political or capital reserves, is required in the interim, there is a good chance that when the time comes, 15 or 20 years hence, to consider a replacement for Trident, the forces at work then may be different—at that point, inertia may favor allowing the British nuclear capability to lapse. It may be seriously doubted whether an attenuated “preserving stability” rationale would then seem sufficiently compelling to overcome the inertia.

What is at issue here is not solely (or even primarily) justifying the UK deterrent to external critics who might question its point and purpose, and its legitimacy (although we will come to that). As or more important is the “internal” rationale—the accepted purpose that motivates those involved in the administration and operation of nuclear programs, and on which depends the survival of those programs in the evolutionary struggle for funding from increasingly constrained defense budgets. Although the current British government may reiterate its commitment “to safeguarding our national capability to design, develop, and produce nuclear weapons in the future,”<sup>5</sup> ensuring adequate funding of the nuclear infrastructure is likely to be increasingly difficult. With no major new projects on the horizon and no likelihood of conducting further nuclear tests, there must be a real prospect of the gradual decay of the UK nuclear capability to the point where staying in the business after Trident requires the sort of effort which a future government is not prepared to

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<sup>5</sup>Malcolm Rifkind in the House of Commons, 18 October 1993: Official Report, Col. 36.

make. The development, or emergence, of a stronger rationale would seem necessary if eventual death-by-atrophy of the UK's nuclear capability is to be avoided.

### **“BLESSING IN DISGUISE” OR “ULTIMATE EVIL”?**

For proponents of the UK deterrent, the problem is not merely the weakening of the traditional rationale, it is the emergence of an alternative and contrary vision of the role played by nuclear weapons (Britain's included) in international security affairs. In stark contrast with the traditional NATO view of nuclear weapons as forces for stability, this alternative attitude regards those weapons as both immoral and substantially useless from the Western viewpoint. The *locus classicus* of this school of thought is the 1992 paper entitled “From Deterrence to Denuking” by then-Congressman Les Aspin, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. “There has been a fundamental shift in our security interests regarding nuclear weapons,” Aspin wrote. “In the deterrence era, we needed nuclear weapons to deter strategic attack on the U.S. and to deter an overwhelming conventional attack in Europe. In the post-deterrence era, the incentives are reversed. It would be in our interests to get rid of nuclear weapons.” The United States (“the biggest conventional force on the block”) now risks finding itself on the receiving end of nuclear weapons’ “equalizing” power. There being no “magic wand” for their instant abolition, the aim should be at least to push them to the margin of international affairs (in the words of two of Aspin’s soon-to-be assistant secretaries at the Department of Defense, to achieve “a reduction in the political salience of nuclear weapons”<sup>6</sup>), through such policies as the pursuit of a comprehensive test ban, a cutoff in fissile material production, and perhaps the ending of “forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.” NATO’s reservation of the right of first nuclear use in self-defense should also be reconsidered, since “[it] may undercut our non-proliferation efforts by legitimizing nuclear weapons and nuclear use.”

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<sup>6</sup>Graham T. Allison, Ashton B. Carter et al. (eds.), *Cooperative Denuclearization—from Pledges to Deeds*, Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1993, p. 4.

The inclusion of the “no first use” issue in Aspin’s paper reflects the perceptiveness of his analysis, for it is indeed a sort of litmus test of two fundamentally different conceptions of the role of nuclear weapons in international affairs. On the one hand, what might be termed the “Blessing in Disguise” view has traditionally been reflected in NATO policy, and is reasserted in the Alliance’s 1991 new Strategic Concept. “Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of any aggression incalculable and unacceptable. Thus they remain essential to preserve peace.” The argument, in essence, is that nuclear weapons (in the right hands, the right circumstances, and with the right doctrine—all vital caveats) can be uniquely effective instruments, not of war-fighting, but of war prevention. Their caution-inducing shadow can deter any adventurism that could conceivably escalate to nuclear war—something especially important in relation to the threat of chemical or biological warfare, where the West has renounced the means to retaliate in kind. If, therefore, those who think this way were presented with Aspin’s “magic wand” for the abolition of nuclear weapons, they would likely decline it—or more precisely, decline it in all circumstances short of the Utopian context of the elimination of all other instruments of warfare as well (that is, “pursuant to a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control,” as the preamble to the NPT has it). Short of this ideal state, adherents of the Blessing in Disguise (BD) school will tend to oppose any constraint on the scope for nuclear weapons (in the right hands and circumstances) to exercise their war-preventing properties and deter aggression at all levels, nonnuclear as well as nuclear. They will therefore reject the idea of “no first use” declarations (the whole purpose of which, after all, is to establish that nonnuclear aggression will not be met with nuclear sanction), arguing—in the words of UK Defense Secretary Rifkind—that such a declaration would be a retrograde step, “out of the realm of war prevention and into the realm of war limitation.”<sup>7</sup>

The opposition to this BD view might be characterized as the Ultimate Evil (UE) school of thought, since its central tenet is that nuclear weapons are uniquely dangerous and repugnant. They alone of all instruments of war have the capacity to destroy humankind.

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<sup>7</sup>Speech at King’s College, London.

There is, therefore, no more important policy objective than to try to ensure that such weapons are never used again. Everything should be done to reinforce the taboo against their use, to marginalize their relevance to international affairs, and to pursue their elimination as far as it can practically be taken. All possible restraints should be applied to their development, testing, production, and deployment, as well as their use. Their only proper role is in the deterrence of nuclear use by others—a tenet which declarations of “no first use” by nuclear possessors could reinforce. Their abolition may, in practice, not be possible, but if it could somehow be engineered, this would constitute a net benefit to humanity, even if the loss of the potential deterrent to some future Stalin or practitioner of biological warfare is acknowledged. If the “magic wand” could be waved, adherents of this view would not hesitate to do so.

This UE view, or something very like it, has now become part of the prevailing intellectual climate in the United States. Objectively, such a development should not surprise. Ever since the U.S. monopoly on nuclear power was broken, there has been an underlying tension between European and American attitudes to the weapons, with the former tending to be more aware of their potential for deterring conventional war in Europe, and the latter more aware of their potential for wreaking strategic devastation on America. Indeed, the development of NATO strategy can best be seen as the management of these tensions, with the doctrine of flexible response embodying a compromise between two competing views of how quickly the threat of U.S. strategic retaliation should be presented to the Soviet aggressor. The outpouring of recent writing on the need to “deemphasize” nuclear weapons is no more millenarian than Ronald Reagan’s vision of a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program that would make nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.”

Of course, a shift in the intellectual climate among those who interest themselves in strategic issues will not necessarily be reflected fully or rapidly in official policies. Thus, although the Clinton administration has pursued a comprehensive test ban and fissile material cutoff, they have shown no disposition to challenge the continued stationing of U.S. nuclear forces in Europe—and, after some public flirtation with the idea, the somewhat anticlimactic Nuclear Posture Review eventually came down, in late 1994, against any move to a “no first use” policy. With the replacement of Les Aspin by William Perry as

Defense Secretary, the emphasis within the Pentagon on matters of nuclear policy seems to have shifted from the radical (or at least provocative) to the cautious.

Nonetheless, neither observation of historical roots nor doubts about the immediate effect on specific policy issues should obscure the fact that an important sea change in American attitudes to nuclear weapons has taken place since the cold war ended. The UE view has become the received wisdom of almost all academic writing on post-cold war security issues, and is widely seen as a *sine qua non* of non-proliferation policies. When such eminent and reputable figures as Colin Powell<sup>8</sup> and Paul Nitze<sup>9</sup> join with those casting doubt on the utility and legitimacy of nuclear weapons in the post-Soviet world, an intellectual tide has set in which will have international significance—and which will make it all the harder for Britain (and France) to revalidate their own nuclear deterrents in the new international circumstances.

It is, of course, quite possible that the United Kingdom might itself come to move with the U.S. intellectual tide, and to shift towards a UE attitude to nuclear weapons. Such a shift would be more likely if a Labour government succeeds the current Conservative administration. We have noted that the Labour party fought the last election with a commitment that in government they would “retain nuclear weapons as long as other countries possess them.” But the platform also included pledges to adopt a “no first use” policy, to work for “the abandonment of the strategy of flexible response,” and to “place all of Britain’s nuclear capability into [disarmament] negotiations.” Such policies (if pursued by a future Labour administration) would reflect UE attitudes. They might imply a new kind of rationale for Britain’s continued nuclear possession, focusing less on the strategic purposes of such weapons than on their value as a source of moral and political capital to be expended in the promotion of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation worldwide. It is not necessary here to examine the pros and cons of such a policy—merely to note that,

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<sup>8</sup>In, for example, a speech at American University in December 1992, quoted by Marc Dean Millot, “Facing New Nuclear Adversaries,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1994, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup>“Is It Time to Junk our Nukes?” *The Washington Post*, 16 January 1994, p. C1.



under such an approach and with such a rationale, the likelihood of Britain remaining a nuclear-weapon state long term would be diminished. Theoretically, the commitment to retain nuclear weapons “as long as other countries possess them” implies indefinite retention. Practically, as suggested above, a rationale that casts UK nuclear weapons not as a positive contribution to international peace and security but as something to be finally disposed of as soon as circumstances (i.e., nuclear renunciation elsewhere) permit is unlikely to bring home the budgetary bacon.

One possible escape from this conclusion is suggested by Robert Levine’s proposal<sup>10</sup> for Uniform Deterrence (UD) of nuclear first use. The idea, in brief, is that the world’s major powers should commit themselves to “punish by appropriate military action” anyone using nuclear weapons (except in response to first nuclear use by another party). The concept embodies the UE attitude to nuclear weapons—it is explicitly based on the axiom that deterring anyone from crossing the fire break to nuclear use should be “at the top of the list of U.S. and world priorities.” But, given the world as it is, it recognizes the essentiality of the nuclear sanction for this all-important deterrent purpose. Levine invokes the image of the United States as sheriff, mustering a posse of like-minded countries to deal with any future nuclear transgressor—for which purpose some at least of the posse must obviously be nuclear-armed. The Uniform Deterrence idea thus suggests one way in which a UE attitude to nuclear weapons could be married with a clear and sustaining mission for the UK nuclear capability.

The difficulty with this proposal is the practical unlikelihood of the British, or any other government, being prepared to commit itself unequivocally in advance to participate in the punishment of a nuclear renegade. The nuclear-weapon states had an opportunity of a similar kind—to reduce global nuclear danger by the formal advance commitment of their own nuclear power—when the nonnuclear-weapon states sought Positive Security Assurances (PSAs) in the negotiations on the NPT. The weak and evasive assurances eventually provided testify to the reluctance of states to put their own national lives on the line in unpredictable future circumstances. This lesson

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<sup>10</sup> Robert A. Levine, *Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use*, RAND, MR-231-CC, 1993.

was recently repeated when Ukraine bargained for security guarantees in exchange for giving up nuclear weapons: all that the three NPT depositary powers were prepared in the event to offer was simple reiteration of their old PSAs.

Britain, then, is unlikely to volunteer for open-ended global nuclear duties; and without some such positive sense of mission, it seems fair to doubt whether a UE rationale for the nuclear deterrent would command the sort of investment that in due course will be required if Britain is to remain a nuclear-weapon state beyond the Trident era. The UE attitude to nuclear weapons now becoming commonplace in the United States will not furnish a new rationale of a kind that could sustain Britain's nuclear status. Rather, it will ensure that the traditional Blessing in Disguise rationale, already weakened by transformed international circumstances, comes under further pressure—in other words, that claims relating to the war-preventing qualities of nuclear weapons, received wisdom in the past, are now more likely to be challenged on first principles.

### A EUROPEAN RATIONALE?

Which returns us to the question—where can a sustaining rationale (assuming one to be desirable) now be sought? One obvious answer might seem by reference to be proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. As the old Soviet menace disappears (indeed, in part in direct consequence of the disintegration of the old Soviet Union), the threat of an increasing number of states, including several ill-disposed to the West, acquiring nuclear weapons is growing. Perhaps Britain's future nuclear role may lie in the deterrence of emergent regional nuclear powers. The refusal of the present British government to develop any such alternative rationale has been conspicuous. In part, this may reflect the reluctance we noted above to volunteer Britain for nuclear duties in the service of the international community at large. But remarks by British ministers portray a skepticism about whether UK nuclear power could be expected reliably to protect even specifically British interests outside the European theater—indeed, about whether nuclear deterrence can be expected to be work reliably at all outside the traditional East/West context.

In a speech<sup>11</sup> in Paris in September 1992, Malcolm Rifkind specifically cautioned against any “belief that nuclear deterrence is straightforwardly exportable from the traditional East/West context.” The uncertainties included how far a nuclear proliferator could be assumed to be “susceptible . . . to the logic of deterrence as we—and our former Soviet antagonists—have traditionally understood it”; whether he might not be disposed to gamble on the West’s being “self-deterred” from use of its nuclear weapons; and how likely the UK ever would be to find itself “so deeply in conflict with a non-European power” that nuclear weapons would come into play in the first place. Rifkind went on to draw attention to the range of other tools and policies—from strategies of denial to direct defenses—that could be expected to prove as or more relevant to combating the risks from proliferation. None of this amounted to a repudiation of any role for nuclear deterrence in these new contexts, but the tone was notably cautious.

There may of course be an element of calculation in this line. By emphasizing that the European security situation is *sui generis*, and that what works there will or may not work elsewhere, it is possible to square the apparent circle of simultaneously supporting Britain’s retention of a deterrent capability as a net asset to international security and urging nonproliferation on the rest of the world. But the bottom line is that it seems unlikely that emergent threats from proliferators will furnish a new and vigorous rationale to carry the UK deterrent into the twenty-first century.

If, then, the rationale is to remain rooted in the European security situation, if that situation has been transformed with the end of the cold war, if in consequence Western security institutions are being redefined (not least to accommodate a developing collective identity among the states of the European Union), then, it may be asked, is it not in the context of that emerging European defense identity that British (and French) nuclear capabilities may find their future *raison d’être*?

The roots of this concept can be traced back to the 1980s. But it was President Mitterrand who first gave it political prominence with his

<sup>11</sup>“*Extending Deterrence?*”—contribution to a “colloquium” on strategic issues, Paris, 30 September 1992.

public musing, in January 1992, about the feasibility of a European nuclear doctrine. "This question," he suggested, "will very rapidly become one of the major questions in the construction of a joint European defense."<sup>12</sup> The theme was taken up in the media, creating the impression that French proposals were in the field to which Britain, as Europe's other nuclear power, should now react.

In truth, British reactions were very mixed. On the one hand, there were attractions in the idea of a nuclear "special relationship" with France that might help to counterbalance the Franco-German axis in European Union affairs. And "Eurodeterrence" suggested an area of possible European cooperation where Britain, so often marginalized in Union affairs, could expect to command a leading role. Nor was there anything new in the principle of extending deterrence to non-nuclear European partners and allies—the UK had been doing this for decades, through commitment of its nuclear forces to NATO.

On the other hand, with instinctive Atlanticism, London was reluctant to embark on any "European" enterprise that could weaken ties with North America. There was no enthusiasm for self-fulfilling prophecies about U.S. disengagement from the defense of Europe. Rather, there was a typically British suspicion of imprecise and grandiloquent ideas that might entail unforeseen downstream consequences. Was the idea of European nuclear deterrence in play without the United States really conceivable, or desirable? Was Britain ready to contemplate nuclear underwriting of a European Union whose expansion could not be guaranteed to remain securely in step with that of NATO? What would be the practical implications for political and operational control of "European" nuclear forces? These uncertainties were reinforced by an acute consciousness of what the UK stood to lose if nuclear cooperation with the United States was jeopardized by an imprudent cross-Channel *affaire*. And there was an awareness, too, that the acquisition of any "European" vocation by British and French deterrents must depend in part on the support, or at least the acquiescence, of nonnuclear European partners—something the Germans and Italians, for example, seemed in no hurry to volunteer.

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<sup>12</sup>Speech at the Palais des Congrès, Paris, 10 January 1992.

These reactions were synthesized by Defense Secretary Rifkind in his September 1992 Paris speech. He emphasized the primacy that Britain continued to ascribe to NATO in security affairs, and the British lack of interest “in exploring hypotheses about what might happen in the absence of a U.S. commitment—both nuclear and conventional—to the defense of Europe. The Atlantic Alliance exists and will continue to exist at the center of our strategic thinking.” He also discreetly suggested that, when it came to guaranteeing the security of nonnuclear partners, France, with its historical refusal to assign forces to NATO command, had some catching up to do. Nonetheless, he spoke warmly of closer cooperation and cohesion between the two West European nuclear powers (“common sense and history combine to urge this upon us”); and he argued that “the European nuclear contribution to deterrence could be strengthened by a clearer perception that the weapons of the European nuclear powers are there not merely to protect the national interests of Britain and France narrowly defined, but to underpin the security of non-nuclear partners and allies as well.” The suggestion seemed to be that Britain could be comfortable with a sort of “Eurodeterrence” approached by developing British and French declaratory policies to reflect the reality of the progressive merging of interests between the countries of Western Europe.

A year later, in his speech at King’s College, London, Rifkind reaffirmed his support for a closer nuclear relationship between Britain and France. He praised the work of the recently established Franco-British Joint Commission on Nuclear Policy and Doctrine, which he suggested had confirmed that “there are no differences between France and the United Kingdom on the fundamental nuclear issues.” He repeated that developing “an identity of interest and of purpose between NATO’s European nuclear powers” was not some sort of exercise in separatism, but should be seen as a process of strengthening the specifically European contribution to collective Alliance deterrence. Nonetheless, it was striking that he should have announced at the outset of his speech his intention “to show why the possession of nuclear weapons by the United Kingdom, in the context of a European contribution to the North Atlantic Alliance, can and should continue to make a positive and necessary contribution to peace and stability.” Here is the clear suggestion that a European

dimension may lie at the heart of the evolving post-cold war rationale for the British deterrent.

So far, so good. But whether this European Vocation can be developed will depend upon a range of uncertainties and variables. The difficult domestic politics of Britain's relationship with Europe may have a bearing, as no doubt will the development of external security factors—what happens in Russia, the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction around Europe's southern periphery, and so on. Excluding, however, such uncertainties, there will be perhaps three key determinants of whether this "European Vocation" for the UK deterrent will have a future or not:

- the scope for Franco-British cooperation;
- U.S. attitudes; and
- the attitudes of European partners and allies.

### **The Scope for Franco-British Nuclear Cooperation**

Enthusiasm at the political level on the part of the current British government has already been illustrated, and appears to be reciprocated in Paris (see, for example, the call for enhanced cooperation with Britain in the 1994 French White Paper on Defense).<sup>13</sup> But it may be that a way will have to be found to progress from joint discussion of policy and doctrine to more concrete forms of technical or operational cooperation if the momentum of the relationship is to be sustained.

At the technical level, it might seem self-evident that a closer cooperation between two small nuclear-weapon states must make for reciprocal benefit through the sharing of overheads and economies of scale. In practice, this may be hard to achieve in any major way—partly because the respective programs (and accompanying design and production approaches) have developed independently and on very different lines, and partly because of inhibitions in relation to the United States. The 1958 U.S./UK Agreement contains an explicit prohibition against dissemination to third parties of information

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<sup>13</sup>*Livre Blanc Sur La Défense*, Government of France, Paris, 23 February 1994, p. 32.

obtained under the agreement. The problem for the UK here is less one of needing to protect specific U.S. information than of disentangling whose intellectual property is whose after three-and-a-half decades of close U.S./UK collaboration. France, whose own cooperation with the United States seems to have been significantly closer than either party has yet been ready to reveal publicly, may for her part be reluctant to make this apparent to the United Kingdom, and may wonder what more could be learned from the UK that has not already been learned from the United States.

Though such considerations may rule out technical cooperation in such central areas as warhead design, mutually beneficial collaboration in more peripheral areas may well be possible. Nuclear safety, security, decommissioning, and waste management are all areas in which each might learn from the other. And the need of both countries to adapt to a world without nuclear tests by development of such alternative techniques as simulation and computer modeling may imply opportunities for fruitful cooperation in a field where the subject matter is at one remove from actual weapon design. It may well prove possible to develop collaboration in this area without cutting across the U.S./UK relationship; although there are many who would argue that, if the policies can be made to fit, the most logical arrangement would be some sort of *ménage à trois* between the Western nuclear-weapon states.

At the operational level, the periodically-mooted idea of coordinating the patrol cycles of respective ballistic-missile submarine forces has little attraction, as long as each government is determined to keep permanently at sea enough of its force to satisfy its conception of an invulnerable "minimum deterrent." The alternative—that each might count on the other to "top up" an otherwise-deficient deployed national deterrent capability, or even that each might rely wholly on the other's deployed deterrent turn-and-turn-about—seems politically infeasible for the foreseeable future.

A potentially more promising area is that of cooperation in nuclear target planning (an activity that may be presumed to continue, despite the "detargeting" of UK nuclear missiles). This need not conflict with the retention by each country of strictly national target

plans. By Richard Ullman's account,<sup>14</sup> France has long covertly maintained two sets of target plans, one for independent action and the other coordinated with SACEUR. If two, why not three, the third coordinated with the United Kingdom? The payoff would include greater intimacy between the respective nuclear staffs, and perhaps some useful doctrinal development.

Currently, each country claims to size its deterrent by reference to a level of damage that it believes it must be able to threaten—damage, that is, outweighing any gain that a potential aggressor might hope to achieve. The concept is imprecise, but presumably relates to the specific gains that could be hoped to flow from aggression *against that nation*. Although, as we have seen, Britain has always argued that its national deterrent provided valuable underpinning to the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Europe, it has never been suggested that the UK deterrent was, single-handedly, sufficiently formidable to render that guarantee redundant. The UK and French deterrent forces may be regarded as adequate to underwrite national security, but not the security of Western Europe as a whole.

Not, that is, individually—but taken together? If the potential for joint and complementary action of these two forces were established and advertised, might not the two governments with justice make plain their belief that it should be adequate to deter major aggression directed not merely at their own vital national interests but at those of their European partners and allies as well? Common sense seems to suggest that such a belief would be entirely justified. Although it is possible to imagine various scenarios of future aggression against Western Europe, it seems inconceivable that such aggression should ever be undertaken on the basis that retaliation from the British and French deterrent forces combined should be accepted as a price worth paying.

The limits of this proposal should be made clear. The proposal relates only to how the two governments might orchestrate the capabilities of their deterrent forces and their potential for complementary action. It would *not* imply any suggestion that other West European states should henceforth regard themselves as

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<sup>14</sup>See "The French Connection," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1989.



covered by a Franco-British nuclear umbrella; France, for one, is clearly far from ready to volunteer any such commitment at this stage. Nor does it imply that the U.S. guarantee could or should be dispensed with. It does suggest that the nuclear element of that guarantee (*not* the conventional) might one day become in the strict sense redundant, if sufficient solidarity developed in the European Union. But redundancy of mutual support between allies in a defensive alliance is an asset to be valued. At this stage, the proposition is merely that the European contribution to the Alliance's collective deterrence could only be strengthened by London and Paris making plain the potential for joint and coordinated action of their respective nuclear forces.

### **U.S. Attitudes**

The second regulator on the potential speed of development of "Eurodeterrence" is the position of the United States. As noted above, the importance ascribed by London to the continued engagement of the United States in European security through NATO, and to bilateral nuclear cooperation, is such as to give the United States an effective veto over UK policy in this area. Of course, like many political vetoes, actually to use it might be to have it shatter in the hand. Any crude attempt at coercion might backfire, driving London and Paris together in a search for mutual support made all the more urgent if American backing was withheld. However, such a scenario seems wholly improbable—not least because, when it comes to voicing Atlanticist objections to European security developments that might tend to the exclusion of the United States, London is usually more royalist than the king.

Of course, Washington had shared London's initial alarm at such developments as the creation of the Franco-German "Eurocorps," at a time when it seemed that forces so designated might be withdrawn from NATO command. Once, however, the "separable, not separate" compromise had been reached—the understanding that, by "dual-hatting" arrangements, "European" forces could be created without weakening NATO—the Clinton administration clearly concluded that the development of a European Defense Identity (EDI) need not be a zero-sum game vis-à-vis NATO. In the language of the 1994 NATO summit declaration, "The emergence of a European Security

and Defense Identity will strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance while reinforcing the transatlantic link and will enable European Allies to take greater responsibility for their common security and defense.”

Plainly, European integration as such holds no terrors for the Clinton administration. On the contrary, the instinct in Washington is to regard it as historically inevitable and geostrategically desirable—as well as administratively tidy. There is a sense that an administration that would sooner focus on domestic than on foreign affairs, and on Asia than on Europe, is attracted to the simplicity of dealing with Europe *en bloc*. Whether America’s national interests will ultimately be best so served is perhaps a different issue. But, as the last U.S. ambassador in London, Raymond Seitz, spelled it out for the British in his valedictory address, “America’s transatlantic policy is European in scope. . . . It is the policy of one continent to another.”<sup>15</sup> Britain’s path to influence in Washington, he suggested, now lay through Paris and Bonn. Uncomfortable though this last perception may have been, the British will nonetheless have regarded the way ahead on the EDI agreed upon at the NATO summit as vindication of their own emphasis on seeing such an identity grow within, rather than in opposition to, NATO—and as in effect an American green light to the cautious development of, among other things, a European Vocation for the national deterrent.

One other feature of U.S. policy might work, inadvertently, to foster a closer nuclear relationship between London and Paris. We noted above the development of a powerful tendency in the United States to question the whole legitimacy and utility of nuclear deterrence—a tendency not apparent, in anything like the same degree, in Britain or France, where mainstream strategic thinking remains attached to the Blessing in Disguise view of nuclear weapons. We noted the potential value of a European Vocation as a sort of vaccination that might be administered to weakened national rationales to help them better withstand attack by this resurgent strain of Ultimate Evil thinking. The more endemic UE thinking becomes in the United States, and the more it is reflected in specific policies of a kind that impact on other nuclear-weapon states (for example, policies of re-

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<sup>15</sup>See “Britain Belongs to Europe,” *The London Times*, 20 April 1994, p. 1.

straint designed to encourage nonproliferation elsewhere), the more attractive their nuclear *entente* is likely to seem to the present governments in both London and Paris.

### Attitudes of European Partners and Allies

All that said, the development of a nuclear dimension to the EDI would require something more than the support of Britain and France and the tolerance of the United States—it would need at least the acquiescence of nonnuclear European partners. German attitudes would be crucial, and the evidence is that the Germans currently have little interest in the acknowledgment of the protection of some sort of Franco-British nuclear umbrella in the European context. Indeed, the dominant German view appears to be that, with the ending of the cold war, nuclear weapons have become for all practical purposes an irrelevancy. Thus, while the Germans show no disposition to rock the NATO boat by challenging the continued presence of U.S. nuclear forces on their soil, they cannot be expected to take kindly to the UK and France attempting to award themselves leadership roles in the developing European Union on the strength of their nuclear capabilities.

Selling “Eurodeterrence” to Germany would not, then, be an easy task, even if the pitch soft-pedalled the military/strategic case and aimed instead to persuade Germans that, politically, a collective deterrent was an essential part of Europe’s coming of age. Such an approach could succeed only if the means were available to make Franco-British nuclear forces “European” in more than merely nominal terms—that is, to involve other European partners at least as closely as nonnuclear NATO allies have been associated with U.S. extended deterrence in Europe through “burden-sharing” arrangements (provision of bases for U.S. forces, operation of national delivery systems under “dual-key” arrangements, and so on). Conceivably, had Britain and France decided to collaborate on a new air-to-ground stand-off nuclear missile, such a project could have become the vehicle for a wider European cooperation. But, given the British decision in October 1993 not to proceed, it is not easy to see by what other means nonnuclear European partners could be given a proper “ownership stake” in a European nuclear policy.

To put the matter another way, and pick up an institutional proposal sometimes advanced by advocates of Eurodeterrence, if a European equivalent of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group were to be established, what could there be for it to discuss? In current circumstances, the interest of the majority might well be as much in constraining as in sharing in the French and British deterrent capabilities. Ironically, this suggests a rather different sort of European nuclear "responsibility-sharing" arrangement—one designed to accommodate more European fingers not on the nuclear trigger but on the safety-catch. NATO's stillborn Multilateral Force (MLF) would be the obvious, if inauspicious, precedent—an arrangement designed to give the nonnuclear European allies control of nuclear weapons in the sense of the power not to initiate but to prevent launch. It could not be expected that such "negative control" arrangements could be applied to the entirety of the British and French national arsenals (any more than the MLF encompassed more than a fraction of the U.S. arsenal)—and even that would be hard for the two nuclear powers to accept. But it might at least provide for the Germans, Italians, and others the sort of locus to influence the planning and policies of their nuclear partners which is likely to be the minimum they would require in exchange for the acknowledgment of a specifically European role for the UK and French deterrents.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is time to review the argument. In essence, it has been to suggest that both British and French nuclear deterrents may face an eventual death-by-atrophy unless they can acquire a renewed sense of purpose—and that, in current circumstances, this seems most likely to be found in the development of a "European Vocation" for the two forces. The question is not urgent, since inertia will support the continuation of current programs. But something more compelling than references to deterrence's evident success in preserving peace in Europe during the cold war will be required when current programs are complete and inertia starts to work in favor of allowing the capabilities to lapse, absent a good rationale for further investment in them.

That “something,” that good rationale, may very well be supplied by the history of the supervening years. But, of the currently foreseeable developments, it seems most likely that the gradual consolidation of a European defense identity, within NATO but associated with the European Union, will provide the context in which the rationales of the two deterrent forces can best be redefined. Making a success of “Eurodeterrence” will not be quick or easy. It is much more likely to come at the end of a long process of integration of conventional forces and policies than to be the element of European security policy that sets the pace, and it may come about only if Britain and France are prepared to accept a degree of constraint on their nuclear freedom which neither would currently be prepared to contemplate. The alternative, however, to such a constrained nuclear capability may ultimately be none at all.



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A EUROPEAN VOCATION FOR THE FRENCH  
NUCLEAR DETERRENT?

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Olivier Debouzy

In 1994, French deterrence doctrine and weapons became for the first time subject to a thorough albeit discrete review, followed, for the first time in thirty years, by an official and public debate on French defense, its basic tenets and paradigms, and its future.

This debate marked a watershed. Unlike the case in the conventional arena, the presidency of François Mitterrand was particularly conservative and unimaginative as far as nuclear matters were concerned. The longtime opposition of Mr. Mitterrand to the *force de frappe* and his reluctant and slow acceptance of the Gaullist legacy<sup>1</sup>

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NOTE: This paper was conceived during a stay at RAND in March 1994. It underwent extensive rewriting and was completed after a year. Without the support and encouragements of Bob Levine, I would probably have given up because of my professional obligations as a lawyer. Special thanks are therefore due to Bob, who acted as an unrelenting, demanding, but also caring and stimulating intellectual midwife, helping me to focus my thoughts, express them, and, eventually, publish them. My thanks also go to Nicolas K. J. Witney, with whom Bob and I discussed, during my stay at RAND and in further transatlantic telephone conferences, in the most stimulating and challenging manner, the issues addressed in this piece. His sharp mind, unflappable argumentative abilities, and concise and elegant style I despair of ever matching. Dr. James A. Thomson, president and chief executive officer of RAND, gracefully welcomed me to RAND and allowed me to spend fruitful and studious weeks there, relieved of material contingencies. Gregory Flynn, James Wendt, and David S. Yost reviewed this piece and provided pertinent advice and invaluable help. The opinions expressed here are of course mine alone, as are possible errors and mistakes.

<sup>1</sup>For the period 1960–1980, Michael M. Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1981, especially the section on “Opposition Policies and Fifth Republic Security Policy,” pp. 205–221. Concerning the Mitterrand presidency, Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton,

may explain why he was careful, as head of state, to display the strictest nuclear orthodoxy. On May 5, 1994, five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, three years after the initiation by the Atlantic Alliance of the most sweeping review of its nuclear doctrine, two years after the coming to power of a U.S. administration intent, according to one of its senior officials, to go from “deterrence to denuking,”<sup>2</sup> and three months after the release of a new Defense White Paper—the first since 1972—the French President reiterated, in a speech before the main representatives of the French defense and foreign affairs establishment, the most traditional statements concerning the nature, function, and operational mode of the French deterrent.<sup>3</sup> Statements reaffirming the validity of deterrence of the strong by the weak (*dissuasion du faible au fort*) and rhetorically opposing France’s war-prevention doctrine to the warfighting doctrine of NATO, ruling out any modification of the French nuclear doctrine toward an increased operational flexibility as heresy, had a slightly unreal quality.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Mitterrand, who had initiated a nuclear testing moratorium on April 1, 1992, stated in a May 5 speech that as long as he was president, France would not test unless other nuclear powers did and predicted that his successors would feel compelled not to resume testing and to adhere to a Complete Test Ban (CTB) treaty as early as 1996. This was the only point on which the president departed from the Gaullist orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

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NJ, 1993, particularly the section, “Security Policy under the Socialists: Adapting to de Gaulle,” pp. 112–118.

<sup>2</sup>Les Aspin, “From Deterrence to Denuking: Dealing with Proliferation in the 1990s,” January 21, 1992, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Defense Policy Panel, *Shaping a Nuclear Policy for the 1990s: A Compendium of Views*, 102nd Congress, 2nd session, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, December 1992. Soon thereafter, Mr. Aspin was appointed Secretary of Defense by President Clinton.

<sup>3</sup>“Intervention de M. François Mitterrand sur le thème de la dissuasion,” Service de Presse, Présidence de la République, May 5, 1994.

<sup>4</sup>*Idem*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>*De facto*, Mr. Mitterrand’s statement was only valid with respect to the United States. China tested at least three times since the beginning of the French moratorium, in April 1992, without France reconsidering the possibility of resuming nuclear testing.



Ironically, this display of almost paroxysmal conservatism by a Socialist president had been preceded, for several months, by a nuclear review initiated by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur. Almost as soon as he had come to power, in the spring of 1993, Mr. Balladur had appointed a blue-ribbon commission to prepare a revision of the 1972 Defense White Paper, which had hitherto been the sole official reference of the French defense policy through three presidencies. This commission went to work in the summer of 1993 and its debates, which lasted until February 1994, were lively and thorough, involving everybody who was somebody in the French strategic community.

There was of course an element of internal politics in the setting up of the Defense White Paper Commission: rather than challenge directly the prerogatives of the president in the field of defense, as Prime Minister Jacques Chirac had done during the first *cohabitation* period (1986–1988),<sup>6</sup> with little success, Prime Minister Balladur adopted a tactic that resulted in their smooth and ambiguous circumvention. By creating a forum for a dialogue on strategic and defense matters, the prime minister in effect moved the center of gravity of the French defense debate away from the president without explicitly calling into question the latter's status and the institutional balance of powers within the executive branch of the government.<sup>7</sup> The White Paper Commission in fact produced a compromise, the crafty wording of which could not bridge the gap between the reiteration of the traditional nuclear dogma favored by the president and the somewhat rambling but innovative concepts put forward by the commission's analyses. The 1994 Defense White Paper nevertheless appears as the first attempt in many years to outline a French

<sup>6</sup>*Cohabitation* is the institutional situation in which the president and the government proceed from different (and opposed) majorities. However common this situation may be in the United States, it used to be quite exceptional in France, where the political logic of the Fifth Republic had, between 1958 and 1986, resulted in the presidential majority being the same as the parliamentary one. *Cohabitation* has hitherto occurred twice: once between 1986 and 1988, when Jacques Chirac, a Gaullist, was prime minister under a Socialist president, François Mitterrand, and the second time between 1993 and 1995, when Edouard Balladur, also a Gaullist, was prime minister, again under François Mitterrand, as Mr. Mitterrand had been reelected in 1988.

<sup>7</sup>David Buchan, "Paris makes European security ambitions clear," *Financial Times*, February 24, 1994.

defense and deterrence policy based on a different set of assumptions and paradigms than the Gaullist dogma.

In effect, just as de Gaulle's reshaping of the French deterrence and defense policy signalled the beginning of a whole new era in French military policy, the *aggiornamento* advocated by the 1994 French Defense White Paper may signal a major reorientation of the French defense concept and, therefore, of the French nuclear doctrine.

It can be said that the end of the cold war and the following crises that ensued in the nascent "New World Order" (or lack thereof) have contributed to turn the French strategic predicament on its head. The 1994 White Paper's treatment of nuclear issues is fundamentally different from what it was in the 1972 White Paper. It is a significant departure—and almost a generational one—from past French doctrine. The 1994 White Paper has not, however, drawn the conclusions from its rather bold analyses. In particular, it shied away from an analysis of the role that French deterrence could play in the European context and in the building of the European pillar of a renovated Alliance.

The debate engaged by the Defense White Paper Commission about the continuing validity of the premises and assumptions upon which the French nuclear doctrine was built is therefore incomplete. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how that debate can be pursued and expanded, and what answers may be given to the questions it raises.

The first part of this paper will summarize France's "traditional" nuclear concepts and policies. They are to a large extent still relevant to analysis of the recent and present conduct of French nuclear policies.

The second part of this paper will formulate recommendations for a new French deterrence policy in the light of foreseeable strategic evolution.

The argument developed hereafter is that the French deterrence concept has outlived its political and military relevance, and that unless it undergoes radical change, it is condemned at best to insignificance, possibly to become a liability both vis-à-vis France's European partners and internationally. Such change cannot, how-

ever, be incremental; it requires a reinvention of the French deterrence concept, of its ambit and its rationale. Assigning the French *force de frappe* a clear European role within NATO in cooperation with the British nuclear force appears to be the way of the future.

## THE TRADITIONAL FRENCH POSITION

What is conveniently called the “traditional” French position has largely outlived its creator, General de Gaulle. In fact, one of the most remarkable features of France’s nuclear policy has been its continuity.

This absence of change was made possible in part by the strategic immobility of the cold war. This, in turn, meant that the successive French governments based their strategic policy on a number of political and military assumptions that, in spite of a rhetorical commitment to change, they assessed to be more or less permanent. These assumptions shaped France’s doctrine and operational posture.

### The Importance of Nuclear Weapons for French Security

French nuclear policy, unlike American, has never been heavily shaped or influenced by academics and theorists. If there are some important French strategists such as Generals Pierre Gallois and André Beaufre, not to mention de Gaulle himself, there are no French equivalents of Herman Kahn, Albert Wohlstetter, Bernard Brodie, or Henry Kissinger. Because the rules of the nuclear game were invented almost a generation before France became a nuclear power, France had to adapt to the reality of the bipolar U.S.-Soviet rivalry; its policy consisted essentially in the carving of a nuclear niche from which it could derive maximum political and military leverage.

France’s nuclear doctrine is therefore relatively simple; it was conceived and implemented according to a political design; its primary purpose was never military.

Nuclear weapons were first and foremost developed by de Gaulle in response to France’s post-World War II security dilemmas between

the requirements for an independent defense and the economic and social imperatives of the welfare society,<sup>8</sup> as well as between the burdens of alliances and the fragility of collective security in the nuclear age.

De Gaulle's attitude was shaped by the desire to avoid repetition of a situation similar to the collapse of the French alliance and defense system in five weeks in the spring of 1940, which had led to the destruction of the Third Republic and the occupation and carving up of France by Germany and the abdication of its national sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> This episode had left de Gaulle with the lingering conviction that, when the survival of one's country was at stake, one could not but count solely on its own forces, and that the interwar policy predicated on the commitment of allies and on the building of collective security arrangements to protect France's security was fatally flawed. This was all the truer in the nuclear age, where alliance systems, if they included a nuclear component, in fact meant that one country could have to stake its own survival for the sake of its allies and where collective security systems could be put irrevocably at risk by the default or treachery of one of the nuclear powers. Hence France had to possess the weapon which it could only threaten to use for its own survival. The second event that influenced de Gaulle was the Suez crisis, a symbol of the Fourth Republic's inability to conduct an independent foreign policy because of its persisting military weakness and the need to resort to foreign help.<sup>10</sup> The humiliation suffered by the French government and its inability to resist U.S. pressure left de Gaulle convinced that France should never again be put in such a situation and must be able to defend what it considered as its "vital interests" all by itself, since relying on the support of foreign powers had led, during the Fourth Republic, to the progressive

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<sup>8</sup>Edward L. Morse, *Foreign Policy and Interdependence in Gaullist France*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1973, chapter 4, "Welfare Versus Warfare: Defense Autonomy and the Dilemma of Insufficient Resources," pp. 147–203.

<sup>9</sup>Among the most recent analyses of the 1940 defeat: Martin S. Alexander, "The Fall of France, 1940," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 13, 1990, pp. 10–44; Henri Dutailly, "L'effondrement," in André Corvisier and Guy Pedroncini (eds.), *Histoire militaire de la France*, Vol. III, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1992, Chap. XV, pp. 379–404.

<sup>10</sup>Christian de La Malène and Constantin Melnik, *Attitudes of the French Parliament and Government Towards Nuclear Weapons*, RAND, RM-2170-RC, 1958, p. 33.

alienation of France's foreign policy to the will and whim of foreign powers.

From the political standpoint, de Gaulle construed nuclear weapons as providing France with the "equalizing power of the atom" (according to Gallois's formula) in four respects. First, vis-à-vis the United States and the Alliance, nuclear weapons would put France in the major league of nations. De Gaulle's ambition was always to put France on a par with the United States and the United Kingdom, at least symbolically. Nuclear weapons were therefore important for French security because they enabled France to sustain its "Great Power" status. The underlying reasoning supporting this pretense was that, since nuclear weapons would be decisive in major crises, the countries which possessed them would naturally exercise a decisive influence in their resolution. The possession of nuclear weapons therefore had not only military but political consequences in times of crisis insofar as, according to Raymond Aron's famous formula, in the nuclear world, the crisis is the substitute of actual military confrontation.

The possession of nuclear weapons was, in essence, a shortcut allowing France to restore its role as a major player both within the Alliance and at a global level. To some extent it worked, although neither the United States nor the UK accepted the idea that possession of nuclear weapons by and of itself conferred on France the right to participate in the direction of the Alliance. This eventually led to the departure of France from the integrated military structure in parallel with the reorganization of the French armed forces around the nuclear mission. Although France always stuck by its allies in times of crisis, de Gaulle made it clear that its Alliance commitments were subordinated to its national defense policy. Of course, this doctrine presented the Alliance with the prospect of an uncontrolled French recourse to nuclear weapons in times of crisis, thereby destroying the carefully constructed flexible response "escalation ladder" elaborated by McNamara's "whiz kids." This triggered considerable unease with the Americans but led to exactly what de Gaulle had hoped for—continuous dialogue between the French and the Americans on nuclear matters and on more general military questions outside the framework of NATO's military structure, thereby giving the French more leeway as well as a

position if not comparable with that of the British, at least “special” enough in the Alliance to satisfy de Gaulle’s pride.

De Gaulle’s successors have essentially stuck to this position although they have generally chosen to express it less directly. Under Presidents Pompidou and Giscard d’Estaing, the emphasis was placed on refining the mechanisms through which NATO and France would cooperate and on making them work. Under President Mitterrand, this evolution was pursued, although in a more awkward manner as the changes in the European strategic landscape made it more obvious that France’s cooperation with NATO was not so much an option as a necessity.

Second, *mutatis mutandis*, the “equalizing power of the atom” was seen as playing a similar role vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The possession of a nuclear force would present the USSR—never explicitly identified as an adversary until 1984, although the technical characteristics of the French force made it its obvious target—with an intractable dilemma—if it launched an attack against Europe, including France, the French nuclear force would be able to inflict damages that would weaken the Soviet Union in the following exchange with the United States. The French nuclear force was therefore an implicit adjunct to the U.S. nuclear capability, thereby complicating the military calculus of the Soviet Union in Europe to the point where the added French independent deterrent capability would in fact make it impossible for the Soviet Union to reach an agreement with the United States to avoid escalation and to contain a war at a “manageable” level. This military function provided considerable political leverage to France vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The possession of such weapons made France an interlocutor for the Soviet Union on all questions pertaining to the security of the European continent. France was not merely a NATO ally like the others but an independent player to be reckoned with. It derived from the possession of nuclear weapons a significant diplomatic leeway that it used to promote its own policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union as well as non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members.

Third, France used the equalizing power of the atom vis-à-vis Germany, although in a much more implicit and unstated way. True, de Gaulle had made a historic move to relaunch a wide-ranging security cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany after hav-

ing himself, upon his coming to power in 1958, put an end to the previous cooperation. That cooperation had almost led, in 1957, to France developing nuclear weapons in common with the FRG.<sup>11</sup> There was always, on de Gaulle's side, the idea that the Franco-German cooperation was as much designed to keep Germany in check as to tie it to Western Europe to prevent a possible drift toward the East under Soviet seduction or pressure. As time passed and Western Germany reemerged as Europe's economic powerhouse, the possession of nuclear weapons appeared more and more as a strategic counterweight to Germany's influence both within the Economic Community and within the Alliance.

Fourth, vis-à-vis the world community, nuclear weapons were construed by de Gaulle as an instrument enabling France, to use the later formulation of a British foreign secretary, to "punch above its weight." Before 1960, only three out of five members of the United Nations Security Council—the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—were nuclear-weapons states. In 1960, France became a nuclear power, and in 1964, the People's Republic of China. De Gaulle, however, managed to establish in the public mind a strict correlation between the possession of nuclear weapons and the membership in the United Nations Security Council, one reinforcing the other. In that sense, the possession of nuclear weapons by France, although it was of little actual value in the day-to-day workings of the Security Council, reinforced the "Great Power" status to which it aspired. Successive French governments have used this symbolic dimension to claim a right to have a say in the world's major crises or on questions that would otherwise have been beyond the reach of the French diplomacy.

From the military standpoint, France's possession of nuclear weapons enabled its successive leaders to say that the French defense policy was *tous azimuts*, meaning that France had the capabil-

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<sup>11</sup>Wilfrid L. Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1971, pp. 54–61. Also see Catherine McArdle Kelleher, *Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, Columbia University Press, New York/London, 1975, pp. 146–153. A thorough French analysis of this episode, based not only on published sources but, for the first time, on personal archives and testimonies, has been made by Colette Barbier, "Les négociations franco-germano-italiennes en vue de l'établissement d'une coopération militaire nucléaire au cours des années 1956–1958," *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, Vol. 12, 1990, pp. 81–113.

ity to strike “on all points of the compass” to defend its interests. This capability remained, however, theoretical, the French nuclear force having been configured to hit Soviet targets and in particular the main Soviet “demo-economic concentrations,” including targets of military relevance. However, this contention to be able to project globally its nuclear power has reinforced France’s image as a truly global power and legitimized, in discourse and in reality, attempts to partake in the resolution of various international crises, whether nuclear or nonnuclear. In many respects, the possession of the *force de frappe* was used as a substitute for actual involvement in military action.

In addition to its external functions, the *force de frappe* had a twofold internal role. It was used to foster a new national consensus around French defense and the institutions of the Fifth Republic—nuclear weapons were, so to speak, part of the “modernization package” proposed by de Gaulle to the French people, including institutional and military reform and the restoration of the French sense of pride and grandeur. How the possession of a nuclear force came to embody the spirit of modernity and revival for the French public opinion is easier to analyze in retrospect than it was to many at that time. The *force de frappe* was not only criticized by those who, like the French Communist Party (PCF), considered it bad *per se* because it was aimed at the Soviet Union and it diverted money from social programs, but also by those who, although fierce anti-Communists and/or convinced of the utility of nuclear weapons to contain militarily the Soviet Union, believed that the possession of such weapons by France was of marginal utility, if not a drawback in terms of Alliance management and with respect to France’s relations with its main allies. De Gaulle’s genius, in this respect, was to convince public opinion that nuclear weapons were more than weapons, that they were indissociably part of a scientific, technological, and industrial pattern to which France had to conform unless it was prepared to fall backwards and trail other major industrial powers. In other words, de Gaulle buttressed the strategic rationale for the possession of nuclear weapons with a wider political one based on the one hand on the appeal of modernity in a rapidly changing society and on the other on the craving of French public opinion for *grandeur*.



De Gaulle also used the creation of a nuclear force to modernize a profoundly conservative and uninnovative military establishment. By reorganizing the French armed forces around the nuclear deterrent, de Gaulle, in defining military policy, shifted the balance of power from the military establishment to the civilian, political authority; coerced the French defense system into modernity; and, in spite of its withdrawal from NATO integrated military structure, managed to combat effectively its backwardness and parochialism and make it a modern and proud force fully integrated into the nuclear culture.<sup>12</sup>

After fifteen years of inglorious and eventually disastrous colonial wars, nuclear weapons were seen in the 1960s as the answer to the increasingly incompatible constraints among the responsibilities of international status, the burdens of modern defense, and the promises and benefits of the welfare state. As for the armed forces, nuclear weapons were both the symbol and the instrument of renewal and of a restored pride and status, a new frontier substituting for those of the now-defunct Empire and guaranteeing a continuing world role for France.<sup>13</sup>

### Operational and Political Dilemmas

The operational doctrine of the French deterrent was based on two principles and two implicit assumptions. The first principle was the concept of "deterrence of the strong by the weak" (*dissuasion du faible au fort*), which is the military expression of the equalizing power of the atom. Expressed in its purest form, this concept threatens any aggressor with a retaliation that would exceed the potential gain of an attack on France. The second principle was that the deter-

<sup>12</sup>General J. Delmas, "A la recherche des signes de la puissance: l'armée entre Algérie et bombe A, 1956-1962," *Relations internationales*, No. 57, Spring 1989, pp. 77-87. See also Martin S. Alexander and Philip C. F. Bankwitz, "From *Politiques en Képi* to Military Technocrats: de Gaulle and the Recovery of the French Army after Indochina and Algeria," in George G. Andreopoulos and Harold E. Selesky, *The Aftermath of Defeat: Societies, Armed Forces and the Challenge of Recovery*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 1994, pp. 79-102.

<sup>13</sup>One of the few American analysts to have understood it at the time was Henry A. Kissinger: *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, 1965, pp. 41-64.

rence of the strong by the weak must be implemented—despite denials to the contrary, themselves part of the French deterrence doctrine—in a relatively linear manner. The “national deterrent maneuver” was organized in a sequence of (i) conventional engagement, to “test” the enemy’s intentions, as if such intentions had not been clear enough from the very beginning of an aggression in Europe. If, as would likely have been the case with the Red Army, the enemy defeated NATO as well as French conventional forces, France would then (ii) issue a “final warning” with its tactical weapons, which in turn would be followed by (iii) retaliation on the aggressor’s territory with French strategic forces.

These principles were based on two assumptions. The first was that the main (and *de facto* only) threat against French security interests was the Soviet one. The “national deterrent maneuver,” and the operational posture geared towards its implementation, could make sense only in the European context and, for all the posturing about the *tous azimuts* nature of the French nuclear force, its operational planning is likely to have been much more narrowly defined than was generally thought. The second assumption, which appears in retrospect even more troubling, was that the operational planning and even the structure of the French nuclear force were based on a *de facto* dovetailing between the French and the NATO defense systems. In fact, France acted as the nuclear free-rider of the Alliance, purposefully postponing the commitment of its forces—euphemistically earmarked as “NATO’s general reserve”—until the moment when its own direct security interests would be at stake, using NATO conventional forces both as a buffer and as a way to raise the level of violence to a threshold consistent with the engagement of the “national deterrent maneuver.”

In the 1980s, France’s operational doctrine and posture evolved somewhat. French conventional posture became more flexible, emphasizing increased cooperation with NATO through the Rapid Action Force (French acronym, FAR), a light multidivision-size unit able to be projected forward to fight side-by-side with the rest of the allied troops on the central front. At the same time, however, French tactical weapons, renamed “pre-strategic” in 1984, and their planning were increasingly decoupled from the French conventional forces. In essence, France traded a limited participation in the Alliance conventional defense against an increased “nuclear na-

tionalism.” This nuclear nationalism did not, however, exclude a dose of operational flexibility, although this did not lead to a *rap-prochement* with the Alliance, as this flexibility was exploited mostly for national purposes. Whereas, in the 1970s, the range of the *Pluton* tactical surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) (less than 80 miles) constrained the modalities of the delivery of the “final warning” and implied, at least in the field, some practical arrangements between the NATO and French commanders, in the 1980s the evolution of the French tactical force toward a greater technical and operational flexibility (essentially with the coming into service of the air-launched *missile air-sol à moyenne portée*, French acronym ASMP), instead of resulting in a closer cooperation between France and NATO, produced the opposite result by making it easier for the French government to dissociate the national deterrent maneuver from that of the Alliance. There was therefore a double contradiction in the French doctrine:

- Between a conventional posture evolving towards a greater cooperation with NATO and a nuclear posture made more flexible but for narrow national perspectives only.
- Within France’s operational nuclear posture, between an increasing technical and operational flexibility, *de facto* favoring synergy with NATO’s, and a political stance that in effect increasingly dissociated France’s deterrent doctrine from that of the Alliance.

As a result, the French strategic and political rationale for the possession of nuclear weapons, stated in terms of strict national relevance, has appeared increasingly at odds with France’s other stated security policy goal, the construction of a European defense. De Gaulle’s successors have gone to great lengths to put a European spin on the French nuclear doctrine and to present the *force de frappe* as an asset for NATO and a future European defense, with, however, limited success. In fact, during most of the cold war, the value of the French deterrent to the Alliance was its unpredictability, because other NATO governments—especially the United States—knew that this unpredictability could be managed through agreements with France. In addition, there could be only so many ways to use the French deterrent given the scenarios of aggression and the technical capabilities of France’s nuclear weapons. This situation was actually

the best of both worlds for France insofar as France could assert that its deterrent contributed to European security by and of itself without requiring any coordination with NATO. This situation was in fact so comfortable that it prevented successive French governments from understanding fully the evolution of the Alliance. Thus NATO learned to adapt the nuclear doctrine and posture without France taking part in its strategic discussions and planning. In spite of the lip service faithfully paid during NATO summits to the contribution of independent nuclear forces to Alliance deterrence, the other European NATO members never really accepted this contribution as a bona fide one, all the more since the British example proved that it was possible to have an independent deterrent yet commit it to the common defense. The result of this evolution was that, by the end of the cold war, France's nuclear policy and doctrine were at odds with its foreign policy, especially its proclaimed willingness to build a European defense. In spite of largely symbolic attempts by the French to bridge the gap with their European partners, the rejection by successive French governments of any discussions of substance with their nonnuclear European allies—as well as failure to cooperate with Britain on nuclear matters<sup>14</sup>—on issues pertaining to the planning and conditions of possible use of the French nuclear forces, even tactical ones, had more or less convinced France's allies that there was no more room for cooperation outside than inside NATO.

From the late 1980s onward, the French contradictions became more acute. In a speech before the first European session of the Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense Nationale in 1988, the French defense minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, stated both that

To interrogate oneself, as has sometimes been done, about the explicit extension of the French nuclear guaranty to other European countries is to disregard the implicit role that it has had for a long time

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<sup>14</sup>Olivier Debouzy, *Anglo-French Nuclear Cooperation: Perspectives and Problems*, Whitehall Papers, Royal United Services Institute, London, 1991.

and that the French deterrent could become the “bulwark” of a European defense system.<sup>15</sup> Successive French defense ministers, notably Pierre Joxe, have stated that “it is already possible to contemplate a multilateral collaboration on the conditions of use [*mise en œuvre*] of nuclear means and an extension of the nuclear guaranty”<sup>16</sup> and President Mitterrand himself mentioned, in January 1992, the possibility of devising a European nuclear doctrine for British and French forces—within the European Community.<sup>17</sup>

Conspicuously lacking from such advocacy of the European role of French nuclear forces was the mention of the sole institutional framework in which nuclear issues have been and are successfully discussed and managed, namely, NATO. The increasing *operational* flexibility of the French nuclear force did not appear to be matched by an increasing *doctrinal* and *political* flexibility; to the contrary, the emphasis on the *tous azimuts* concept smacked of a renationalization of the French security policy that was inconsistent with the stated goal of building a European security architecture. As soon as it became clear that the glue of a common threat would disappear and that NATO would be left to its own devices to find ways to renew its purpose and find new justifications for its unity, the question of the role of the French deterrent in the new Europe and in NATO’s future organization was once more posed in the most critical manner. Circumstances did not make it possible any more to take for granted that a natural synergy would be maintained between the French and NATO military posture, and—in spite of a progressive adaptation of NATO nuclear doctrine that, for all their very real differences,

<sup>15</sup>Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Ministre de la Défense, “Discours devant la session européenne de l’Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense nationale, 22 novembre 1988,” in Dominique David (ed.), *La politique de défense de la France*, Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense Nationale, Paris, 1989, p. 311.

<sup>16</sup>Pierre Joxe, Ministre de la Défense, “Discours d’ouverture,” in Ministère de la Défense, *Un nouveau débat stratégique: Actes du Colloque de Paris, 29 septembre–1er octobre 1992*, La Documentation Française, Paris, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>Discours d’ouverture de M. François Mitterrand aux Rencontres Nationales pour l’Europe, Paris, 10 janvier 1992, Service de Presse, Présidence de la République, January 10, 1992, p. 9. For a critique of the contradictions in the French position, see Olivier Debouzy, “Limites du paradoxe nucléaire français,” *Libération*, February 3, 1992.

brought it closer to France's own concept<sup>18</sup>—the need appeared for new statements of principles, this time commanded not by necessity but by a positive commitment based on a new assessment of the strategic situation and of the goals to be achieved, to explain the role that the French deterrent could play in European security.

In addition, the internal political rationale for maintaining a nuclear deterrent was much shakier than before.<sup>19</sup> As long as the cold war lasted, characterized by its near-complete military and political gridlock, the French nuclear force was widely accepted since it in effect exonerated the French from thinking about the problem of military commitment. The post-cold war world soon proved to be a much less comfortable and predictable place than before. As the Gulf War and the Yugoslav conflict soon demonstrated, it required actual commitment of forces abroad, *actual* participation in which *actual* casualties could be sustained. The possession of nuclear weapons soon ceased to appear as a catch-all answer to military challenges which, although less threatening than those posed by the former Soviet Union, were much more real. The long shadow of nuclear weapons grew shorter by the day, and with it France's political and military leverage in a variety of situations where its great power status was directly at stake. In the absence of a real debate on these issues until 1993, the public debate remained embryonic, but among experts there was considerable unease over the prospect of perpetuating a defense structure and a deterrence doctrine so at odds with the emerging strategic reality.

In summary, the vindication of France's political theses on the evolution of European security and the reflections on the possibility of an increased operational flexibility of its nuclear force have not been

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<sup>18</sup>According to David Yost, "NATO nuclear weapons policy has, it is true, become increasingly vague. But, to the extent it still exists, it still emphasizes principles such as flexibility, selectivity, crisis management and early war termination—and not the official French doctrine of (a) favoring an extensive initial salvo against a large number of military targets and (b) ruling out limited follow-on use, as damaging to deterrence." Correspondence with the author, January 1995.

<sup>19</sup>Pierre Hassner, "Un chef d'œuvre en péril: le consensus français sur la défense," *Esprit*, March 1988, special issue, *La France en politique*, pp. 71–82. David S. Yost, "France," in Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti (eds.), *The Defense Policies of Nations: A Comparative Study*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 1994, especially pp. 249–252.

matched by a similar doctrinal *aggiornamento* that takes into account the new parameters of European security. The French dilemma therefore remains as acute as ever: how to reconcile a deterrent concept the rationale of which was first and foremost to increase France's leverage vis-à-vis its partners and enhance its status within an otherwise stable and cohesive security alliance with a political approach emphasizing transatlantic and European solidarity on which French security will increasingly depend in a turbulent and unpredictable strategic environment.

### OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

The end of the cold war and the reshaping of the European order have called into question the very assumptions on which French nuclear doctrine, policy, and posture were built. The official French position, however, remained until 1993 one of denial, refusing to draw the consequences from the dramatic evolution.

Ironically enough, the fact that the declaratory objectives of the French security policy have been achieved to a large extent through the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany and the brutal reappraisal of the assumptions of the cold war proves to be as much of a problem as a blessing for the French government. From the nuclear standpoint, the post-cold war world is a difficult one indeed. Is the possession of nuclear weapons still the currency of power? Do nuclear weapons have as much of a role in the security of France as they used to? How must the French nuclear force and doctrine evolve in order to meet new security challenges in a profoundly modified strategic context? The debate undertaken under the aegis of the Defense White Paper Commission is only a beginning. Because it is essentially the result of a compromise between the conservatism of a declining president in the last years of his mandate and the innovative but still unfocused ideas of a still-constrained strategic establishment, the 1994 White Paper offers a modestly renewed perspective on deterrence in a deeply changed strategic context. In truth, in spite of the subtle *aggiornamento* of the Defense White Paper, the French nuclear doctrine still remains doughnut-like, with a gaping hole in the middle. It is now clear that one needs to go further and contemplate what it purposefully avoids—namely, what role the

French deterrent could play in the building of a European defense and how to embody it in an appropriate institutional framework.

### **The Necessity for a Renewed Nuclear Paradigm**

It is obvious that, in the post-cold war world, the conditions of implementation of the French nuclear doctrine have changed altogether. These changes were recognized only in part by the 1994 White Paper.

The disappearance of the Soviet Union, of the Warsaw Pact, and therefore of a massive Soviet threat of surprise attack in Europe has changed the context of the exercise of deterrence by France. Moreover, nuclear weapons may still have an important military value, but in a world where the division of Europe has all but disappeared, a unified Germany has become the powerhouse and the economic and political center of gravity of Europe, the threat of apocalyptic war has receded, and the European alliance system has become considerably looser, the main benefits enjoyed by France from the possession of a nuclear deterrent have been considerably reduced. France's possession of nuclear weapons does not give it anymore a privileged position among Europeans in their dialogue with the United States, nor does it constitute a lever vis-à-vis Germany; it may still be an insurance against the resurgence of Russian military aggressiveness, but it is clear that, were this contingency to materialize, France's degree of autonomy in handling the political and military aspects of a crisis would be minimal. Meanwhile, the impact of the French deterrent on France's ability to influence the management of European "minor" military contingencies appears dubious at best. Whether the French deterrent is adapted to the contingencies and military challenges of the future will depend on how far France is willing to go to adapt its doctrine and force structure to the new European and world reality and institutional setting.

This takes the whole debate back to the question of France's role in the current and future strategic landscape. This "certain idea of France" extolled by Charles de Gaulle, according to which nuclear weapons were the symbol as well as the instrument, appears today as slightly *passé*. Nuclear weapons restructured the world and strategic landscape, but only up to a point. In Europe, they contributed to



freeze it for two generations, but the forces already at work under de Gaulle—and of which he took advantage in his political management of France's relations with its allies—eventually proved far more powerful.

In this respect, the recent pronouncements by French officials express a degree of convergence between the French appraisal of the concept of security itself and that of other Europeans, which may herald the disappearance of the “French exceptionalism” as far as security perceptions and policies are concerned. As was discussed above, the French exception consisted in the past of a stated view of the security of Europe radically different from that of its partners (even if the reality of French analyses and policies was *de facto* closer to theirs). The end of the cold war has resulted in an objective *rapprochement* between France and the other members of the Alliance. France is more or less adopting the strategic views of its European partners on the desirability to maintain the Atlantic Alliance, openly acknowledging its importance in terms of cohesiveness and security of the West European countries.<sup>20</sup> France does not even challenge NATO's “Partnership for Peace,” implicitly acknowledging that *détente*, *entente*, and *coopération* are not the natural state of affairs in a Europe freed from the *blocs* but result from an evolution in which France is one of many players. In fact, the current process of reappraisal of the European strategic situation and of the perspectives of European defense requires a reappraisal of France's nuclear doctrine and policy.

The 1994 Defense White Paper indeed tries to give a new lease on life to the *tous azimuts* rationale by highlighting the emergence of new risks and threats. It emphasizes the “more diversified . . . scenarios in which nuclear deterrence may be exercised: relations with current or future great powers, relations with regional powers which could

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<sup>20</sup>Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Bulletin d'Information*, January 30, 1995, “XXème anniversaire du Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision : intervention du Ministre des Affaires étrangères, M. Alain Juppé,” pp. 7–21 and particularly p. 12: “Our partners cannot accept, and rightly so, that their European commitment conflicts with their Atlantic option. . . . For its part, France cannot any more dissociate its action towards a European defense from a positive Atlantic policy. . . . The time is past of a supercilious reserve vis-à-vis the Alliance or of a closet participation which would be unworthy of our country. . . . It must be clear that France favors a robust Alliance and that she will commit herself unreluctantly in its necessary renovation” [author's translation].

threaten our vital interests.”<sup>21</sup> The White Paper therefore hints at replacing the single nuclear paradigm that was hitherto the basis of the French deterrence doctrine with a more diversified one emphasizing the idea that deterrence of the strong by the weak must be supplemented by other doctrinal hypotheses, such as “deterrence of the mad and the bad” (*dissuasion du fort au fou*), aiming at proliferators and aggressors against French vital interests less narrowly defined than before.

One must, however, be realistic. Justifying the perpetuation of the French deterrent by Third World threats is a weak rationale to justify the perpetuation of a doctrine and a force structure the creation and existence of which are so intimately linked with the European context. Besides, could a contingency realistically arise that would require, especially outside the East-West context, actual threat of the use of nuclear weapons in which France would be involved alone? It would either be so limited that nuclear threats would be politically unacceptable, or so important that it is even more doubtful that France could go nuclear without minimum collaboration with the other Western nuclear powers. In any event, if such a crisis involved the United States and the United States ruled out the nuclear option, France would probably have no other choice than forsaking it.<sup>22</sup>

The remaining rationale for the maintaining of a French nuclear force therefore appears to be a general assurance against instability or global threats. But such threats could not be confronted by France alone. Whether the general stability argument will be enough in the future to convince public opinion and Parliament to vote credits for a force whose relevance appears increasingly questionable in the light

<sup>21</sup> *Livre Blanc sur la Défense 1994*, collection des rapports officiels, La Documentation Française, Paris: 1994, p. 80.

<sup>22</sup> The British Defense Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, made a cogent argument against the use of nuclear deterrence outside the European context in his speech at the colloquium organized by the French Ministry of Defense in Paris in 1992. Malcolm L. Rifkind, “L’avenir de la dissuasion: point de vue britannique,” in *Un nouveau débat stratégique*, op. cit., pp. 99–100. For a more theoretical approach with similar conclusions, see Michael Quinlan, “The Future of Nuclear Weapons: Policy for Western Possessors,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 1993, pp. 489–490. Also see G. William Hopkinson, *Changing Options: British Defence and Global Security*, Global Security Programme Occasional Paper, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, June 1992, pp. 12–13.

of the current French doctrine is questionable. In a nutshell, France's dilemma is that, in its current form, its nuclear doctrine can neither be perpetuated on traditional grounds, as the reality underlying them has profoundly changed, nor on more exotic ones, as they could trigger a political momentum that could negate the benefits derived from its special status as medium-sized, independent nuclear power. Even if the doctrine's increased operational flexibility makes it possible to consider more diversified contingencies for use of the French nuclear force, its political relevance is essentially European. The *aggiornamento* of the French nuclear doctrine is therefore an absolute necessity.

### **The European Vocation of the French Nuclear Forces**

As was seen above, there are in fact few ways in which the French nuclear paradigm can be renewed; extending the role of the French deterrent to give the French concept a European dimension is the most obvious. We are currently witnessing the emergence of Europe as a unified security area. Although distinctions between NATO and former Warsaw Pact countries, and between the Visegrad countries<sup>23</sup> and states such as Romania, Albania, or Bulgaria are still relevant, it should be noted that some states belonging to the European Union, such as Greece, have in fact more in common with the latter than with the former. Notwithstanding these—real and by no means trivial—differences, European countries are in fact facing the same risks, and to a large extent the same threats, and may not be able to tackle them unless they define a common security policy, which cannot eschew the nuclear question.

It could be argued that the existing security structures, such as NATO and the Organization (formerly Conference) for the Security and Cooperation in Europe, in the security field, and the European Union, in the political and economic field, have demonstrated their ability to withstand change and crises and have so far provided solid bulwarks against the implosion of the European security system. This is largely true. However, the existing doctrines and defense concepts governing the defense of Europe are ill-suited to confront

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<sup>23</sup>The Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary.

and solve the security problems of the future. It will be submitted below that nuclear deterrence remains a relevant and effective means of addressing Europe's most serious security challenges, and that France can contribute decisively to the reshaping of the European security order provided that it is prepared to partake in the reform of the existing and working Western security institutions, particularly NATO, and to accept a distribution of roles between these institutions and the political and economic organizations that may have a smaller, albeit critically important, role in smoothing transitions and stabilizing countries not yet able to become members of the military structures.<sup>24</sup>

The context in which France's security policy must now evolve has deeply changed, but some of the factors justifying the perpetuation of its deterrent are as valid as ever. First, Europe still lives under the long shadow of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are by nature global weapons; whether they are actually stationed on European territory is actually of little importance as long as they can be targeted on Europe. In this respect, Europe is still subject to the potential threat of Russian nuclear weapons. In spite of the disaggregation of the once most powerful army in the world, Russia is likely to remain the most significant military player on the European continent. More specifically, confronted with the reality of a rapidly evolving conventional technology that is, for the foreseeable future, all but unaffordable to armed forces which have suffered severe economic constraints, Russia is likely to cling to its nuclear weapons as the last symbol of its great-power status.<sup>25</sup> It would therefore be paradoxical that, at a time when Russia is coming to terms with the issue of nuclear deterrence, European nuclear powers jettison what remains their main military asset. Second, the stabilizing role of nuclear weapons must not be underestimated. Although they are by no means the answer to each and every security crisis in Europe, they provide a stable background that would prevent any military crisis

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<sup>24</sup>On this point, Alain Juppé, op. cit., p. 13: "A European defense will not be built outside the Atlantic Alliance. The extension of the European Union must, for the countries which will apply to it, imply that of the Western European Union, [and] will involve, sooner or later, the enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance" [author's translation].

<sup>25</sup>David S. Yost, "Europe and Nuclear Deterrence," *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Autumn 1993, pp. 100-104.

from evolving into a major confrontation. Nuclear powers exercise, by the sole fact of possessing weapons that may transform any major direct attack against them into an unpredictable confrontation, a special role in the management of military crises and conflicts in Europe, irrespective of the probability of the actual use (or threat of use) of such weapons. In Michael Quinlan's words, "There has been a deepening recognition that [nuclear] weapons create and express a *reductio ad absurdum* in warfare, making serious war between developed states no longer an option for the conduct of business or the pursuit of interest."<sup>26</sup>

It could be argued, as the 1994 French Defense White Paper to some extent does, that this situation vindicates the French nuclear doctrine and policy; that, as European nuclear powers *de facto* exercise a stabilizing role in Europe, there is little need for a change of doctrine and of the existing institutional arrangements.

Such an opinion—widely held in France, where nuclear questions remain, to a large extent, a taboo that few are willing to break—disregards the dynamics of European security and underestimates a serious risk, that of the "renationalization" of European countries' security policies. This risk is all the more dangerous since it is disguised under the rhetoric of cooperation. In France, inability to address openly the necessary institutional changes has led to vacuous rituals and initiatives that have become the substitute for a revision of French attitudes and policies vis-à-vis actual military cooperation in existing, functioning alliances. The Franco-German-Spanish-Belgian Eurocorps is an illustration of this trend. Even when used for strictly European endeavors, the Eurocorps could only operate according to NATO rules and procedures, for they are the only common ones to the countries committing forces to it. At the political level, ambiguity reigns as to the Eurocorps' objectives: it is, in effect, only at the price of such ambiguity that it has been allowed to survive.<sup>27</sup> As for the

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<sup>26</sup>Quinlan, "The Future of Nuclear Weapons," *op. cit.*, p. 487.

<sup>27</sup>The Eurocorps, initially conceived as a Franco-German "brigade" (although units at this level do not exist any more within the French army), was first mentioned in the Franco-German European Initiative of October 14, 1991. Peter Schmidt, *Le couple franco-allemand et la sécurité dans les années 90: l'avenir d'une relation privilégiée*, Les Cahiers de Chaillot No. 8, Western European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, June 1993, p. 67. For a critical appraisal of the Eurocorps, see William T. Johnsen

Western European Union, it is little more than a talking-shop and an antechamber to confine aspiring NATO members to a simulacrum of membership until they are ready for the real thing; if the WEU has a role, it is essentially as a finishing school for countries that have yet to reorient their defense policies and restructure their armed forces; in no way can it appear as a substitute for NATO.<sup>28</sup> The WEU may indeed act as a front for NATO in carrying out missions in which the NATO flag would be more of a hindrance than an advantage; this role was expressly provided for by NATO in its January 1994 Summit communiqué.<sup>29</sup> But the various military episodes of the Yugoslav war involving Western forces have demonstrated that there is little the WEU can do by itself. NATO itself is not entirely free from the perils of window-dressing—the progressive addition to the integrated command and planning system of so-called “separable but not separate” joint combined task forces allegedly emphasizing flexibility is in fact little more than an attempt to put a multinational spin on the progressive disaggregation of the integrated military structure under the joint assaults of budget slashers, politicians eager to cash the mythical “peace dividends,” and military establishments trying to protect their force structures rather than restructure them to adjust to an era of constrained resources and greater interoperability requirements.

Last, the European Union's efforts to define a “Common Foreign and Security Policy” amount to little more than discussing how to supplement an intergovernmental dialogue on the management of bud-

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and Thomas D. Young, *Franco-German Security Accommodation: Illusions of Agreement*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Peter Schmidt, “Partners and Rivals: NATO, WEU, EC and the Reorganization of European Security Policy: Taking Stock,” in Peter Schmidt (ed.), *In the Midst of Change: Approaches to West European Security and Defense Cooperation*, Nomos Verlag, Baden-Baden, 1992, pp. 187–228.

<sup>29</sup>“We support strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance through the Western European Union, which is being developed as the defence component of the European Union. The Alliance's organization and resources will be adjusted so as to validate this. . . . We therefore stand ready to make collective assets of the Alliance available, on the basis of consultations in the North Atlantic Council, for WEU operations undertaken by the European Allies in pursuit of their Common Foreign and Security Policy.” Declaration of the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council of January 10–11, 1994, Brussels, NATO Press Service, press communiqué M-1 (94) 3, January 11, 1994.

getary procedures and regulatory and antitrust policies with a dose of political legitimacy by considering security topics devoid of institutional concrete implementation. The current institutional confusion of European organizations on security questions reveals that security risk is not perceived as compelling enough to justify the maintaining, let alone the setting-up, of defense structures that go beyond mere statements of intentions. Europe cannot come to terms with the reality that its defense was primarily an American burden and that the Europeans were content to be advisers to the U.S. decisionmaking process and supporters of the American leadership. As America refuses to lead and Europe cannot find in itself the resources to define a common security identity, governments are reacting individually on an *ad hoc* basis to whatever contingencies arise that threaten them most directly (Maghrebi security risks for France, Spain, and Italy, instability in the Baltic and Eastern Europe regions for Germany, etc.). The problem of the renationalization of European defense policies goes beyond this: it risks actually destroying whatever unified defense and security concept the Alliance had without allowing European countries to define a new security paradigm that could become the basis for a common security policy.

Two countries, and two only, stick out because their history, their international ambitions and status, and their political weight and military apparatus endow them with a global view of security problems and the structures to cope with them, if imperfectly—the United Kingdom and France. Europe, fulfilling the Kissinger prophecy, *de facto* remains a collection of various self-centered powers largely unable to tackle the dilemmas of global security, and the U.S. presence in Europe is becoming militarily, if not politically, residual. As a result, the United Kingdom and France are both reflecting on the ways and means of future European security. These reflections, initially separate, are increasingly being conducted jointly. For the United Kingdom, such reflection is a natural spinoff of its privileged status as the United States' historically main partner in Europe, which entails various responsibilities as well as sophisticated dual defense planning both in national and Alliance terms. For France, the current situation brings the progressive raising of a European consciousness, which is in fact the realization that French defense cannot but be considered in relation to that of the Continent as a whole and that, unless France overcomes its national idiosyncrasies, its defense

policy is going to be confined to the empty symbolism of rituals devoid of military and political significance.

In other words, if it is true that, ultimately, when it comes to defending one's vital interests, alliances count for less than the ability to do it by oneself; if it is true that, as the French saying goes, the nuclear risk cannot be shared; if, by nature, the nuclear decision is a strictly national one; any nuclear cooperation cannot be but wishful thinking; but then, the usefulness and relevance of the French nuclear deterrent in political and military terms may be little more than a self-entertained delusion. The future of the French deterrent lies in Europe. It is now clear that, unless France bridges the gap between its defense and European policies, its nuclear force will be nothing more than the obsolescent remnant of a bygone glory. Because nuclear deterrence remains central to European security and because the existence of the French deterrent is, by and of itself, a political and strategic asset of major significance, it is intuitively clear that France will have to somehow give its nuclear doctrine a European dimension. Interestingly enough, this hypothesis remains almost unmentioned in the 1994 Defense White Paper, save for general developments about the "building of Europe and a contribution to international security"<sup>30</sup> and, as regards deterrence, "the European project" described in the vaguest terms.<sup>31</sup> Whereas the White Paper does not shy from bold statements on the operational *aggiornamento* of the French deterrent concept, the absence of any detailed reflection and proposals on possible *political* evolutions—probably because of the awkward political circumstances of the *cohabitation*—is all the more striking.

How could the French deterrent play a European role? What institutional arrangements could be made to further European security interests? These questions condition the future relevance of the French nuclear deterrent.

<sup>30</sup>Livre Blanc sur la Défense, op. cit., pp. 46–47.

<sup>31</sup>"The issue of a European nuclear doctrine will become one of the major questions of the building of a common European defense. This matter will become increasingly relevant as the European Union will define its political and its security and defense identity. Such a perspective is remote, but its sight must not be lost. With nuclear [weapons], Europe's autonomy in the field of defense is possible. Without [them], it is ruled out." *Livre Blanc sur la Défense*, op. cit., p. 81.



France should not shy away from a redefinition of its “vital interests,” emphasizing their political rather than their geographical nature, and thereby drawing the logical consequences from common interests and shared vulnerabilities. France would, in effect, acknowledge that its vital interests lie not only within its frontiers but in Europe, and that its nuclear deterrent makes sense primarily—if not only—in a European context. This would require only a limited change of its nuclear posture.

The British example is in this respect a useful precedent, proving that the preservation of “supreme national interests” is compatible, and even strengthened, by the commitment of one’s deterrent to a wider mission.<sup>32</sup> In effect, preventing crises before they become an immediate and overwhelming threat to one’s survival is a wise use of deterrence, as it avoids the all-or-nothing dilemma that has always been the blind spot of the French deterrence doctrine—what is the use of a deterrent if it can be committed only in circumstances where, everything else having been lost, one is reduced to the dire choice of the precarious preservation of one’s survival in a hostile environment and an all-out war resulting in one’s destruction? Moreover, by extending the ambit of its deterrent doctrine, France would signal its willingness to contribute to a new European security architecture in a way more striking than any other.

The French discourse on European unity would be backed by a concrete and visible commitment that would signal a point of no return in European cooperation, thereby eliminating the doubts and recriminations which feed suspicion, inertia, and hesitation among France’s European partners.<sup>33</sup> It need not even be specified what the geographical area covered by French deterrence is, as it is a false problem likely to generate endless and rancorous interrogations.

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<sup>32</sup>Rifkind, op. cit., p. 103. For the original statement, see *Statement of Defence* 1964, Cmnd 2270, February 1964, paragraph 9, quoted in John Poole, *Independence and Interdependence: A Reader on British Nuclear Weapons Policy*, Brassey’s, London, 1990, p. 210.

<sup>33</sup>François Fillon: “France—as well as the United Kingdom—will not be able to convince their allies and will not be perceived as essential actors of European security if they elude the nuclear question. In fact, we are now obliged to reconcile our nuclear independence and the increasing Europeanization of our foreign and security policy.” “Dissuasion nucléaire et élargissement,” in *Un nouveau débat stratégique*, op. cit., p. 63.

Suffice it to say that France would consider any enterprise of military pressure or destabilization in Europe as a serious security threat justifying an appropriate response, including by nuclear means. Paradoxically, France's doctrine, by its general and unspecific nature, would be an asset, as it would avoid the dilemmas experienced in the past by the United States with the doctrine of flexible response, which, because it covered in detail numerous hypotheses, invariably led to questions about what it did not mention and created a market for politically inane and intellectually confused debates (such as that on de-coupling, which kept the Western defense intellectuals busy for most of the 1980s). This would be of particular relevance for the Visegrad countries, desperately in need of political and military reassurances. It would be paradoxical, as well as dangerous, to deny Central European countries the benefits of a security commitment, if unwise to formulate it in specific terms that could be too easily challenged. The French deterrent could provide an answer to this dilemma. Of course, France alone could not give credible guarantees to Central European countries; this could be performed only by NATO, which remains, to this day, the only credible military alliance in Europe. The prospect of seeing an increasing—and maybe an institutional—synergy between French and NATO nuclear forces may provide a solution to the intractable dilemma of alliance commitments and military guarantees toward Central Europe: nuclear weapons would actually be the instruments of a guarantee that would not require the deployment of conventional forces on the territories of the countries concerned, thereby providing political and military reassurance without, however, being possibly construed as provocative by Russia.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, to be credible, military doctrines and commitments have to be embodied in institutions. At this stage, several institutions are competing for political supremacy in the field of European defense, but only one is actually working—NATO. It must look like a strange idea to entrust NATO with the mission of renovating the nuclear deterrence concept in Europe, especially from the French standpoint.

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<sup>34</sup>For a convergent view, see Bruno Tertrais, *L'arme nucléaire après la guerre froide: l'Alliance atlantique, l'Europe et l'avenir de la dissuasion*, Economica, Paris, 1994, pp. 201–203. For an opposite view, see Roberto Zadra, *L'intégration européenne et la dissuasion nucléaire après la guerre froide*, Cahiers de Chaillot No. 5, Western European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, November 1992, pp. 32–34.

In truth, NATO is probably the only institution where France could provide a contribution to the defense of Europe in a way acceptable both to her and to her allies. NATO has developed, in almost half a century, the most sophisticated and workable “nuclear culture” and nuclear environment ever conceived. This was due in part to the American leadership, but also because the basics and the modalities of deterrence, from the most conceptual to the most practical, were—and are—discussed among allies in a thorough, detailed, and consensual manner. For forty years, NATO nuclear powers (with the exception of France) have provided their allies not only with a reassurance but also with a focus for debate on the primary goals of the Alliance, the best way to implement those goals, and the ultimate rationale of their foreign and security policies. In effect, opposite to the French theory that nuclear weapons tend to divide allies, NATO’s nuclear weapons have actually united them, in spite of “enduring unresolved issues,” to borrow from David Yost’s sagacious formula.<sup>35</sup> They have contributed to the creation and the nurturing of a “culture of deterrence” that has instilled in the minds of policymakers far more diplomatic imagination and military restraint than has ever been the case in the past. Nuclear weapons have made the allied European military establishments less parochial, less nationalistic, and less narrow-minded by forcing them to cooperate in the implementation of a strategy that forced them to think in global terms and made the national features of their defense policies largely residual. NATO’s nuclear establishment, organized around several consultative groups (the Nuclear Planning Group, the High-Level Group, and various nuclear military caucuses) has provided the allies with not only the possibility of being advisers to the American nuclear decisionmaking process, but also “a culture of deterrence,” which has greatly contributed to the general political acceptability of the nuclear deterrence strategy and of nuclear weapons by the bodies politic of Western European countries. Through the British example, NATO nuclear institutional arrangements have also demonstrated that nuclear weapons, even those of medium powers, can make a significant contribution to the common security in a way perfectly compatible with the preservation of the national indepen-

<sup>35</sup>David S. Yost, “The History of NATO Theatre Nuclear Force Policy: Key Findings from the Sandia Conference,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, June 1992, pp. 248–255.

dence of those powers. This institutional background must be preserved and developed. One cannot, for the foreseeable future, see any institutional workable alternative to it.

France ought to participate fully in the NATO nuclear consultative mechanisms and institutional fora. Such participation would make it possible to define the ways and means of its contribution to a European deterrence system as well as decisively influence it as the U.S. nuclear presence in Europe dwindles. Three aspects should in this respect be emphasized. First, participating in NATO's nuclear planning would allow France to become part of the nuclear consultation on the use of British and U.S. nuclear forces for the defense of NATO and, *de facto*, of the Continent; this would enhance the synergy between the French forces and the U.S. and British ones without, however, precluding more restricted consultations between Britain and France on issues of specific common interest, as well as trilateral U.S.-British-French consultations on matters requiring joint planning and action, in and outside NATO.

Second, the French participation in NATO nuclear consultative mechanisms could, as was mentioned before, give a new political legitimacy to the French deterrent, as it would become one of the elements of the common defense. This consultation would not require that French nuclear planning be revealed *in toto* to France's allies; neither the United States nor Britain reveal all of their national strategic nuclear planning to the allies; nor are they asked to. The consultation would most likely take the form of contingency planning in which French nuclear forces would be assigned a mission in the NATO General Strike Plan (without precluding, however, alternative options). It would allow European allies to share French views about the strategic balance and its possible evolutions, and allow the French to inject a dose of their own strategic thinking into Alliance planning, with the likely result that most European allies would have a renewed stake in the perpetuation of a deterrence mechanism, including an asset the value of which they hitherto minimized, if not outrightly disregarded, because of the opacity of the French decisionmaking process on which they had neither insight nor influence.

Associating nonnuclear European states with the planning of British and French nuclear forces is likely to help avoid any additional rift between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots" and potential problems

stemming from it. Finally, in the longer term, giving the French nuclear deterrent a European role could result in a sharing of some operational costs with France's European partners, thereby making the burden of sustaining a credible force more tolerable for France and making this effort a truly European one. There are already in Europe installations, paid for and operated by various national military establishments, initially earmarked to host U.S. nuclear forces. Some of these installations are clearly oversized and could well accommodate French and British forces on a temporary basis for exercises and joint maneuvers without additional costs. It is clear, however, that nuclear cooperation must not aim primarily at financial savings. Those, if any, should be spinoffs of what must be conceived of and implemented as a political venture. The NATO nuclear consultation process could be expanded to keep Central European countries informed, on an *ad hoc* basis, of the evolution of NATO's nuclear doctrine. Confining the governments of these countries to the reading of NATO communiqués appears, under the current and foreseeable circumstances, as a manifestation of political distrust both unnecessary and unproductive.

This should not of course preclude the discussion of deterrence matters—including the French nuclear policy—in a more general, political way within the Western European Union. The WEU could thus constitute a European caucus within NATO without threatening it, as the WEU has no operational competences or means. Its role as an “Alliance European think tank” could be useful, allowing it to test ideas that might then be discussed in a more structured way with the United States. It would put a distinctive European “spin” on nuclear discussions and could constitute a bridge between the European Union, the security competences of which are likely to remain minimal for a long time, and NATO. One could even contemplate, on the model proposed by French politician François Fillon, the setting up of a “nuclear collaboration group” within the WEU that could expand and formalize the talks already in progress between its members on nuclear issues.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, a French decision to fully participate in NATO nuclear planning and to discuss its deterrent concept and its security impli-

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<sup>36</sup>Fillon, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

cations with other Europeans in the WEU could help create and develop a momentum in the European security debate that could accelerate the integration of European defense. Of course, the paradox is that, in order to do so, France would have to overcome its decade-long inhibitions vis-à-vis NATO. But the stakes are simply too high and the necessity of such a move simply too great to not at least give it a serious thought. The French attitude is, in this respect, already changing. Going beyond the cautious and contorted formulas of the Defense White Paper, French Foreign Minister Juppé recently stated:

For the longer term, it is necessary to think about the steps of the development of a European defense, including the mission—a sensitive topic indeed—of national nuclear forces. Paradoxically, the end of the Cold War seems to make the nuclear question less urgent but, on the other hand, it made sources of tension between Europeans irrelevant, notably the issue of tactical weapons. The consensus among Europeans can and must be maintained on the basis of a reaffirmed nuclear deterrence doctrine. After the elaboration of a doctrine common to France and Britain, must our generation shy away from contemplating, not a shared deterrence, but at the minimum a concerted deterrence with our main partners? I am asking the question.<sup>37</sup>

Transforming a rhetorical interrogation into an actual policy debate is indeed one of the main challenges of the French defense policy.

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<sup>37</sup>Juppé, op. cit., p. 11. For an early British view, see Fred W. Mulley, MP, *The Politics of Western Defence*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1962, pp. 86–89: “I proposed at the WEU Assembly in December 1959 that a ‘Joint European Strategic Nuclear Force’ should be created within the framework of Western European Union. . . . In other words, British bombs—and French, when available—could not be used except with the sanction and authority of the WEU council of Ministers. In practical terms it would have meant that the British Bomber Command would be placed under European and not solely national control—rather similar to the decision taken in December 1960, for different reasons, to put Fighter Command under SACEUR’s control. . . . I made the proposal in the knowledge that its implementation would require an end to the British desire to pursue an independent defence policy as an independent nuclear power, although it would not have been inconsistent with British obligations to the Commonwealth or other commitments outside NATO.” [The author was subsequently Secretary of State for Defense under the Callaghan administration.]

### The Practical Side of Things: Bilateral Franco-British Cooperation

To conduct the changes required to achieve the European Vocation of the French nuclear deterrent and accomplish France's proposed evolution vis-à-vis NATO, a bilateral nuclear cooperation between Britain and France appears indispensable. In this respect, the question of whether such cooperation must precede or follow France's *rapprochement* towards NATO is a chicken-and-egg question that is not really worth addressing unless one wants to delay the necessary moves and stall the currently developing European momentum. Britain appears to be a natural partner for cooperation with France. As recent bilateral discussions have acknowledged, the two countries have basically the same doctrine, the same force structure, the same needs, and the same perspectives.<sup>38</sup> There are ample opportunities for consultation and joint political and military initiatives of the French and British governments to answer challenges that cannot be considered separately. In effect, any setback suffered by one of the two governments on nuclear issues is likely to have a ripple effect on the other. Britain and France, whatever residual obstacles—stemming from ingrained bureaucratic habits and the force of inertia—there may still be in both countries to development of their nuclear cooperation, can neither confront future challenges separately nor afford to let the debate spin out of control in the other country lest it affect its own interests.

Nuclear cooperation between France and Great Britain can benefit both from a French doctrinal *aggiornamento*—to which Britain can contribute by the lessons that can be derived by the French from the British history of nuclear cooperation within NATO, however different the French and British nuclear predicaments may initially have been—and a series of institutional moves and practical operational steps that can be pursued in an iterative manner between the two countries, in parallel with France's evolution toward NATO. A prerequisite that could accelerate cooperation between France and Britain is, as was discussed above, a radical reappraisal of the French nuclear doctrine. Such a reappraisal, albeit difficult, is by no means

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<sup>38</sup>Debouzy, *Anglo-French Nuclear Cooperation*, op. cit., and "A Nuclear Entente Cordiale," *European Brief*, August 1993, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 50–52.

impossible, and the election of a new president in 1995 could open a window of opportunity to engage in such an exercise. The ground for such reappraisal has already been prepared by the discussions undertaken within the Franco-British Joint Commission on Nuclear Doctrine and Policy.<sup>39</sup> The announcement by France of the commitment of its deterrent to a European role could be the major contribution of France to one of the NATO summits following the presidential election and to the European Union Inter-Governmental Conference of 1996. It could be prepared and announced as a joint Franco-British initiative. For Britain, this would mean adding a "hat" to the already "dual-hatted" prime minister and dissipating the ambiguity about where its real interests lie; for France, it would mean the end of the nuclear exceptionalism which, barely justifiable on strategic grounds during the cold war, now stands as one of the main obstacles on the road to a unified Europe.

One *caveat* must, however, be raised: in order to work, nuclear cooperation between Britain and France must avoid haste. It would be imprudent to try to merge the French and British deterrents from the outset as if their national characteristics and their respective histories could be transcended simply by political fiat. In other words, developing the Franco-British cooperation on nuclear military matters will require a transitional period during which the two countries should proceed with a careful review of their respective operational arrangements (including, for Britain, the bilateral Anglo-American ones) and with concrete operational experiments. It would be absurd at this stage to enter into a solemn agreement the provisions of which would then remain unfulfilled for a long time or implemented only at the cost of a persisting ambiguity, thereby casting doubt on the political commitment of both parties and making them hostage to the most conservative segments of their political-military establishments. The way for Franco-British nuclear cooperation lies with

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<sup>39</sup>Set up in November 1992 to provide a forum for discussion about nuclear weapons doctrine and policy and issues of concern to both countries, this Commission was made a permanent body at the July UK-French Summit. (Giovanni de Briganti and Michael J. Witt, "France, Britain pursue nuclear ties," *Defence News*, September 17, 1993.) Since then, it has met several times at the level of experts, and has reviewed commissioned papers on issues of nuclear policy and doctrine, including the continuing requirement for nuclear deterrence in Europe, operational requirements and perspectives for enhanced cooperation in the operational field, and nuclear testing simulation.



pragmatic, ad hoc arrangements formalized only insofar as necessary to provide the political authorities of the two countries with a global perspective on the state of their common endeavor and allow points of discussion or of disagreement to be formally arbitrated in the appropriate government settings. At some point, however, and probably sooner than later, the issue of cooperation with the United States must be addressed openly. The 1958 U.S.-British agreement and its covenants govern not only the cooperation between the United States and Britain but also, to a large extent, the relations that Britain may have with its allies on nuclear matters, including within NATO. It is therefore likely that Franco-British nuclear cooperation will involve at some point bilateral U.S.-British and U.S.-French discussions and even trilateral ones. As is now public knowledge—if not widely publicized,<sup>40</sup> France and the United States have for a long time had, if not formal nuclear cooperation, at least a thorough dialogue on nuclear matters, including technical and operational exchanges. This should make it easier to “trilateralize” the bilateral U.S.-British nuclear relationship, especially at a time when its nature is changing. Of course, France’s participation in NATO nuclear planning would make bilateral nuclear cooperation with Britain considerably easier. The French reluctance to change from the outset their relationship with NATO—for reasons pertaining to the impact on the internal political equilibrium of proceeding from “Great Refusal” to “Great Reversal,”<sup>41</sup>—should not impede the momentum of bilateral cooperation, especially if, as was advocated above, it is presented as a European endeavor. In other words, Franco-British nuclear cooperation has a logic of its own and must be pursued as a goal in itself, if only because it is likely that it may facilitate other changes in the French strategic posture and outlook, if it does not derive from them.

<sup>40</sup>Richard H. Ullman, “The Covert French Connection,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1989, pp. 3–33. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie, II: l’affrontement*, Le Livre de Poche, Paris, 1994, pp. 180–185. For a more complete analysis of this question, see Pierre Mélandri, “Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine,” in Maurice Vaisse (ed.), *La France et l’atome*, Emile Bruylant, Brussels, 1994, pp. 235–254.

<sup>41</sup>John G. Mason, “Mitterrand, the Socialists and French Nuclear Policy,” in Philip G. LePrestre (ed.), *French Security Policy in a Disarming World: Domestic Challenges and International Constraints*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, and London, 1989, p. 59.

Franco-British nuclear cooperation could take a variety of forms, some of which may have already been tried. They fall within three categories.

The first is operational cooperation, which could itself be divided into two areas. The first would concern the planning and organization of nuclear forces. France and Britain could exchange views and data and draw up contingency plans for the deployment of their nuclear deterrents and coordination of their alert levels, so as to optimize, at any given moment, their level of nuclear preparedness and their operational capabilities. This would be of particular relevance for their sea-based forces, as the relatively small number of submarines of each country renders such optimization both relatively easy and indispensable. Operational coordination of submarine activity may not even require that the two countries communicate precise data to each other concerning patrol areas. A general coordination on the number of submarines at sea at any given time, and on the preferred targeting of each force, may be enough to achieve significant synergies, thus allowing one of the two countries to earmark part of its force for unexpected contingencies. As far as air-based forces are concerned, the joint air group set up at the Chartres Summit of November 18, 1994,<sup>42</sup> hitherto earmarked for strictly conventional missions, could evolve towards a more extensive form of cooperation encompassing nuclear dimensions.

At a later stage, operational cooperation might also encompass joint operations of the sea-based and airborne nuclear forces of the two countries. Whether such cooperation appears desirable will depend first on the results attained in the planning and organizational area, and second on the progress made in the integration of the French forces within NATO's operational framework. It may also result from the increasing community of interests vis-à-vis external threats that may require displays of common resolve, demonstrated in an obvious way by such joint operations. They could include the joint targeting of targets of similar concern, allowing an optimization of forces much greater than simple operational planning—such joint

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<sup>42</sup>Sommet franco-britannique, Déclaration à la presse des ministres de la Défense, *Bulletin d'information*, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Paris, November 21, 1994, pp. 10–11. Also see Stephen Bates, "Air Force Link Paves Way to New European Alliance," *The Guardian*, November 19, 1994.

targeting could involve the use of different means (ballistic and sea-borne) to overcome defenses, thereby greatly increasing the efficiency of each country's deterrent.

Joint Franco-British planning and operational cooperation would demonstrate, to other Europeans as well as to potential aggressors, that the two European nuclear countries were now thinking in terms of common destiny, both together and in the context of a wider European framework, for it is not within NATO that the display of Franco-British unity would have the greatest political significance, but in the European context. The joint Franco-British nuclear effort would make it clear to other countries that the French have overcome the insularity of their nuclear doctrine and the British their fear of a European approach to security—and this without threatening NATO's cohesion but, on the contrary, strengthening it.

The second area of cooperation between France and Britain could be that of procurement. This would be difficult, for it would involve calling into question the longstanding U.S.-British relationship. The advantage here is that the two countries still have plenty of time to think about it. The current generation of British and French nuclear submarines (respectively, the *Trident* and *Triomphant* classes) entering service in 1995 will remain operational—save any major developments of anti-submarine warfare technology—for at least fifteen to twenty years. The deadlines may be closer for airborne weapons, but are still sufficiently far away to sort out the problems posed by cooperation in this area. Such cooperation need not confront nuclear questions proper at the outset. There are many areas, such as electronics, guidance systems, countermeasures, propulsion, and vector design safety, in which France and Britain could undertake a fruitful cooperation; they both have highly sophisticated and dynamic defense companies and communities.

At some point, though, it would be necessary to contemplate cooperation on nuclear matters. Imperatives of preservation of critical competences and industrial capabilities, as well as patterns of U.S.-British cooperation, should not impede a cooperation that could greatly benefit from the experience gained by each country in specific areas. The French, for instance, have acquired a mastery of the miniaturization of thermonuclear warheads. The British seem to have, for their part, a particular expertise in the area of submarine

detection and, as far as weapons are concerned, electronic counter-measures. These competences could be the basis of a synergetic approach to the research and possibly the procurement of major weapons systems; in a period of constrained budgets, the benefits of such cooperation would be far from negligible in financial terms. A Franco-British common course in this area could also yield significant strategic benefits, especially in terms of French procurement organization. The current French procurement structure, the *Délégation Générale pour l'Armement* (DGA), is a cumbersome and cost-ineffective organization; its restructuring appears, in the current and foreseeable budgetary context, inevitable if painful. There are obviously lessons to be learned by the French from the British experience on restructuring of procurement policies. On the other hand, Britain could find in the French model of development of a national nuclear infrastructure lessons concerning the adaptation of its own nuclear weapons complex. Of course, cooperation in procurement may have to overcome traditional hesitations on each side, as Britain and France have been engaged for decades in a fierce international competition in the arms market. It should be noted, however, that no such competition exists in the nuclear area. In a wider perspective, cooperation on procurement could be extended to the point of involving other European countries—not on nuclear systems proper, but for participation in research, building, and financing of dual-capable systems, such as aircraft, air-breathing missiles, and the like.

The third possible area for Franco-British cooperation would be nuclear testing and/or simulation. At the beginning of this chapter, it was noted that, during his May 5, 1994, speech, President Mitterrand foretold that his successor would not be able to resume nuclear testing. A year later, this prediction appears true; whatever one's position on the necessity of nuclear testing, the political arguments against its resumption seem, for the time being, to be compelling. As a result, Britain and France are confronted with a challenge which neither can resolve on its own. Britain's situation is markedly different from France's. Because of its cooperation with the United States, it is widely believed that Britain is able to rely, at least in the short to medium term, on the experience accumulated through the joint U.S.-British nuclear testing and simulation program and on the stated willingness of the United States to help it make the transition to a technical and operational environment where, testing being for-

bidden, Britain would have to rely on simulation alone to check the reliability and safety of its existing weapons.

France does not benefit from such support and, having undertaken only a modest simulation effort since 1989, is today in a much less comfortable position to achieve the transition from testing to simulation.<sup>43</sup> In the medium to long term, however, Britain and France are going to be facing comparable challenges. The life spans of their current nuclear systems will end around 2010–2015, meaning that they must soon begin to contemplate the prospect of the renewal, if not the modernization, of their weapons. As it is unlikely that the current technologies will still exist twenty years from now, and even if they did, would probably be obsolete by the technical and safety standards of the day, Britain and France are therefore confronted with potentially difficult choices. Cooperating to make the best of the Complete Test Ban that will likely be signed in 1996 becomes an obvious necessity. There too, it may be necessary to sort out the U.S.-British existing agreements so as to establish a substantive Franco-British cooperation. This is why it appears necessary for France to consider the prospect of trilateral cooperation on simulation matters to include the United States; the latter is in fact the only country possessing the required scientific and technological base to overcome the constraints of the test ban. France's participation in NATO nuclear planning would obviously make things easier, although cooperation on a strictly trilateral basis is also conceivable. In the longer term, however, it would be paradoxical for France and Britain to rely on the United States to develop their future nuclear warheads while emphasizing the political need for a European defense in which their joint deterrents would play a major role. Such cooperation would have to be harmonized with the ongoing discussions within the European Union to avoid contradictions between the nonproliferation policy developed within the latter and the common U.S.-Franco-British endeavors and to avoid a rift between the European nuclear powers and their nonnuclear partners.

In summary, Franco-British nuclear cooperation is not destined to be the instrument of a *rapprochement* by stealth between France and

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<sup>43</sup>René Galy-Dejean, MP, et al., *La simulation des essais nucléaires*, rapport d'information No. 847 de la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, Assemblée Nationale, Paris, December 1993.

NATO; neither can it be the teaming up of two medium-sized powers trying to protect their nuclear assets against hard times in the hope that the strategic evolution will eventually vindicate their nuclear stance and make them the natural leaders of a fuzzy European defense project both inside and outside NATO. Franco-British nuclear cooperation must be sustained by a common vision of the future of European security while taking stock of the irreversible changes of the strategic context and anticipating its future evolutions; it must be an inclusive and not an exclusive approach, a dynamic and not a reactive policy. Franco-British nuclear cooperation must therefore, at some point—and the sooner the better—confront the German question.

### The German Dimension

Germany has been for forty years at the center of the European security equation, and it will be for the foreseeable future, although in a much different manner than in the past. Trying to finesse the German question will only postpone choices and make them more difficult: in other words, there will be no restructuring of NATO's defense and building of a European security architecture without taking into account German objectives, aspirations, and fears. Any security *démarche* that does not include Germany will be doomed to fail. The time is long past when NATO could be described as intended to "keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down"; neither France nor Britain, which are *de facto* living under German economic dominance, have the means to take the leadership of a European defense system in which Germany is confined to the role of a second fiddle. This is especially true in the field of nuclear deterrence, where the question is not so much to give guarantees to Germany as to make Germany an integral part of the European deterrence system. The building of a "European pillar" is in fact the real political stake of the current Franco-British effort; but this effort alone will remain incomplete as long as it does not include Germany.

Germany has always had at heart an ambiguous attitude vis-à-vis nuclear weapons; the end of the cold war has only made its dilemma more acute, as well as changed its nature. On the one hand, Germany considers that the guarantee provided by U.S. nuclear weapons against unforeseen threats to European stability is still—

and will remain for quite a long time—necessary. It can even be argued that it is disputable that Germany would accept, under the current NATO and European institutional arrangements, to become more dependent on a guarantee provided by British and French nuclear weapons. To quote David Yost,

The lack of German confidence in British and French nuclear guarantees remains so fundamental that many would agree with Josef Joffe's assessment in 1984: 'The ultimate implication of a Western Europe minus the United States . . . is a nuclear-armed Federal Republic.' As some Germans have noted in interviews, by definition, lesser powers cannot guarantee the security of a greater power; only the United States can offer nuclear protection to Germany vis-à-vis Russia. As a result, British and French forces are likely to remain of interest mainly as a supplement to US forces in that additional centres of nuclear decision-making may complicate the risk calculations of possible aggressors.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, in a new context such as that tentatively taking shape in Europe, it would be unhealthy to perpetuate a strategic relationship in which security guarantees would merely be "granted" to Germany in the way they were before, for two reasons.

First, Germany argues, and with good reason, that it is not any longer a "protected" country; it is, in fact, the nexus of Europe, its center of gravity, both economic and political. As such, it influences the European security context as much as it is influenced by it.

Second, maintaining a situation where Germany is the mere recipient of nuclear protection, by the stationing of nuclear forces on its soil and its participation in NATO nuclear planning as the "senior nonnuclear member," perpetuates an unhealthy situation in which Germany is in fact relieved of major nuclear responsibilities, and therefore may be tempted both by complacency and by escapism. Vis-à-vis the United States, Germany has recently seemed to adopt a consumerist attitude, demanding protection without a real willingness to accept its burdens, particularly vis-à-vis its own public opinion; at the same time, the perpetuation of this situation is the alibi of an immobile foreign and security policy that rejects any active in-

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<sup>44</sup>Yost, "Europe and Nuclear Deterrence," *op. cit.*, p. 112.

volvement in the management of the security of the Continent. The result of these converging factors is a security policy by default, confined to the ritualistic repetition of empty mantras and with little positive input.<sup>45</sup> This is not a satisfactory situation—Germany is in fact at the crux of the Atlantic and the European defense architecture, and it cannot be content to play a passive role that could entail the risk of an evolution towards a more nationalistic, narrow-minded foreign and defense policy, calling into question the structure of Western security itself.

It can be argued that, in a new transatlantic security architecture emphasizing the strengthening of the “European pillar,” Germany would partake in the deterrent dimension not as the “senior non-nuclear member” but as a true partner sharing nuclear responsibilities to a greater extent than was hitherto the case within the Alliance. It is worth remembering that Germany and France had considered, in the late 1950s, the possibility of joint cooperation on nuclear weapons.<sup>46</sup> This project was terminated by General de Gaulle upon his coming to power in 1958. The motive for such cooperation was the will to assert European autonomy in nuclear matters within the Atlantic Alliance. In the new European context, and taking into account the prospect of a European defense that could become the true “European pillar” of the Atlantic Alliance, this issue should be revisited.

France and Britain could provide the bridge by which Germany can concretely and operationally partake in the management of European security. For obvious reasons, there is still an understandable reluctance in Europe to see German conventional forces deployed in countries that, half a century ago, were invaded by Nazi Germany. But because nuclear deterrence is not linked to any specific geographic contingency, it provides an avenue for the deploy-

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<sup>45</sup>For a detailed study of Germany's attitude, see Ronald D. Asmus, *Germany in Transition: National Self-Confidence and International Reticence*, RAND, N-3522-AF, 1992. German opinion is, however, quickly evolving on defense and security matters, as is evidenced by the polls undertaken by RAND in 1993–1994. See in particular Ronald D. Asmus, *German Strategy and Public Opinion after the Wall*, RAND, MR-444-FNF/OSD/A/AF, 1994, p. 49, and Ronald D. Asmus, *Germany's Geopolitical Maturation: Public Opinion and Security Policy in 1994*, RAND, 1995, pp. 10–19.

<sup>46</sup>See footnote 11.



ment of a new dimension of German policy. Germany is already engaged in the process of redefining its security objectives and priorities through the implementation of the Defense Policy Guidelines (*Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien*) adopted in November 1992, emphasizing the maintenance of alliance ties to the NATO nuclear powers.<sup>47</sup>

For Britain and France, the challenge of the years to come is to take advantage of this orientation to associate Germany with the building of a European deterrent system, in close cooperation with the United States, for which Germany is clearly the major European strategic partner. This could be done in several ways. The first would be for France to declare, publicly and unambiguously, that its vital interests are not linked to geography but are of a political nature and, as such, naturally include Germany. There are, in truth, no foreseeable circumstances under which a destabilization of Germany could not constitute a threat against French security. The economic symbiosis between the two countries is already such that including Germany within the perimeter of French vital security interests appears only as an acknowledgment of the obvious. France should therefore bring Germany into its major nuclear decisions and planning, such as the choice of weapons systems, the operational planning of its forces, the definition of the conditions under which its deterrent would be called into play, and the general criteria according to which it would be used. In a sense, this exercise would be quite similar to the definition of NATO's Political Guidelines; its European dimension, however, should be emphasized to incorporate specific German preoccupations, in particular vis-à-vis Germany's neighboring countries. As such association between Germany and Britain already exists within NATO, it should be possible for Britain to consider its extension through a more informal, trilateral cooperation that includes France.

Second, the idea of associating Germany with the actual operation of French weapons should be given consideration. It would indeed be difficult to do so for the sea-based forces, but the French prestrategic

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<sup>47</sup>For a detailed review of the new German defense policy orientations, see Thomas D. Young, *Trends in German Defense Policy: The Defense Policy Guidelines and the Centralization of Operational Control*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, June 1994.

and strategic airborne forces appear to be a possible area of shared operational responsibilities with Germany. (Given the absence of a separate British national prestrategic deterrent—it is widely understood that British sea-based forces will in the future assume this role<sup>48</sup>—this move could be more difficult for Britain). In particular, the option of deploying French prestrategic airborne weapons on German planes under a dual-key or safety-catch system should be given serious attention. This would have an extremely important symbolic effect that would signify in the most visible and irreversible way that Germany is a full-fledged member of the European deterrent architecture and shares responsibilities with the two European nuclear powers, as it already does with the United States. Combining this with French participation in NATO nuclear planning would make the “European pillar” a concrete reality, embodied in an institutional framework that could make it irreversible. Moreover, giving Germany a vested interest in the management of the European defense system at the highest level would undoubtedly increase its influence on the security of the Continent, thereby matching its political and economic influence while deflecting its temptation to “federalize” European institutions, as such federalization would result in a dilution of its power. This would alleviate French and British fears vis-à-vis the institutional evolution of the European Union toward a federalist structure, as well as making such evolution less enticing for Germany itself. Bringing Germany into Franco-British discussions about the future of their deterrents at the earliest possible stage therefore appears to be a promising avenue of cooperation.

By so doing, France and Britain could both achieve their political-military objectives with respect to the building of a credible European defense system within the transatlantic security architecture. France could reconcile its twin objectives of maintaining NATO’s role as the ultimate guarantor of European security, and thus its role within the Alliance as the main proponent of balancing U.S. and European political influence, while enhancing the prospect of a European security cooperation. France would also dispel the lingering doubts that it sees Franco-German cooperation primarily as an alternative to the Alliance security arrangements—a view that can

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<sup>48</sup>Nicholas K. J. Witney, “British Nuclear Policy After the Cold War,” *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Winter 1994–1995, pp. 98–99.

only postpone the achievement of a European defense, insofar as it places Germany in a situation where it is, *de facto*, reluctant to acknowledge greater European military solidarity for fear that it would have an adverse effect on its link with the United States. For Britain, whose nuclear force is already committed to the defense of Europe within NATO, such an evolution could give its commitment a European “spin,” thus affirming Britain’s willingness to go along the European route, without reneging on its Atlantic commitments but putting them into a perspective that affirms its indissoluble solidarity with its European partners.

The German dimension must not be overlooked: history has proven that bilateral defense cooperation, such as that instituted by the 1963 Franco-German Treaty, have in fact little future insofar as they contradict the wider security policies of the parties concerned. To avoid the perpetuation of an awkward *tête-à-tête* that neither country wants to break for fear of the political symbolism it would convey, or wants to expand because it would trigger potentially damageable consequences for their defense policies, France should take the initiative and redefine the framework of the Franco-German relationship by associating Germany with its nuclear doctrinal *aggiornamento*.

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The current situation is in many respects without precedent—no obvious threat forces France to rethink its nuclear strategy; no compelling political necessity makes it urgent to do so. The choice is France’s, but it ultimately cannot make it alone. Whereas this reality was hidden by France’s particular position within the Alliance and on the international scene during the cold war, it is now becoming plainly apparent. This situation is both an asset and a liability; it gives the French government more leeway, but it also means that if it does not seize the present opportunities, its nuclear deterrent may slowly fade into irrelevance.

France stands at the crossroads: for the first time, it can decide, by what would indeed be a decision of major political significance, to discard its previous attitude and enter into an openly synergetic defense policy with its major partners, transforming its deterrent from the symbol of a supercilious nationalism intent on gaining leverage

on its allies through a shrewd and manipulative game into one of the major assets of a common endeavor that will, if successful, make Europe one of the major world powers of the twenty-first century.

The United States is different. For the United Kingdom and France, the existence and future of their nuclear forces are vital national issues; for the United States, the West European forces have never been trivial, but neither have they been central. Although this paper is written from an unofficial and perhaps idiosyncratic point of view, it shares with almost all American thinking about British and French nuclear forces an undertone of detachment: "We cannot control their policy, but let us try to advise them, in their own interest as well as ours." Such detachment may sound condescending; seeming condescension by American analysts and officials irritated many French officials and analysts during the cold war, and it may continue to do so. This paper is intended to be realistic about likely U.S. detachment, but not in a condescending manner.

The remainder of the paper discusses U.S. views on British and French nuclear forces during the cold war, and explores alternatives after our cold victory and into the future. It concludes with a brief peroration.

### **THE COLD WAR**

Many Americans have wished that our British and French allies had forgone their 1940s–1960s decisions to build their own nuclear weapons. The wishes have not been as strong as the parallel ones concerning the Soviet Union in the 1940s, China in the 1950s, or Iraq, Iran, and North Korea in the 1980s and 1990s, but matters would have been ever so much simpler had the UK and France trusted the United States to protect them from the Soviet demons.

As late as 1961, this line of U.S. thought was encapsulated by Albert Wohlstetter.

To sum up the case against national nuclear forces: from the national standpoint of a responsible power, they are costly and of dubious military value. Their political value has been exaggerated, for, as the English have learned, it encourages emulation and is therefore transient. From the standpoint of world stability, wide nuclear diffusion would be gravely disruptive. It would increase the likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons both by accident and by deliberation.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, "To remove any doubts about the responsible use of nuclear power, it is vital to keep that power under centralized control."<sup>2</sup>

This was, in fact, the position of the Kennedy administration vis-à-vis the French force. The British were considered to be under sufficient control; they had participated in the U.S. nuclear program since its beginning, and their relationship to that program was governed explicitly by the 1957 amendments to the McMahon Atomic Energy Act. Even with regard to the French, however, since their first nuclear weapons were already in being by the time Kennedy took office, it was not clear whether the administration really thought it could disestablish that nuclear force or merely wanted to dissociate the United States from its development.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, Charles de Gaulle did not heed Wohlstetter's advice or that coming from the White House and the Pentagon: France, much more than Britain, chose to operate its nuclear force independently of NATO and the United States, as detailed by Olivier Debouzy in Chapter Two. Throughout the early part of the 1960s, the United States struggled with concepts such as the Multilateral Force (the MLF—multinational NATO-manned nuclear-armed ships at sea, with many fingers on the safety-catch but still only one on the trig-

<sup>1</sup>Albert Wohlstetter, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N + 1 Country," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1961, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>3</sup>McGeorge Bundy, who had been a key Kennedy administration participant, describes this ambivalence in *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, Random House, New York, 1980, pp. 485–487.

ger) both to partially contain French independence and to preclude other NATO nations from trying to add their own national nuclear forces. Although MLF never came close to realization, other NATO nations did not try. France, however, remained constrained only by its own capabilities and the imperatives of the fierce feeling for independence and autonomy held by de Gaulle and his successors. Even though the French nuclear program had been highly controversial within the body politic at its start, nuclear independence became the core around which formed the famous French foreign policy consensus during the Cold War.

Once the British and French nuclear forces had been established, American policy toward them was governed in large measure by inertia. NATO was at the core of U.S. foreign policy; Britain and, in spite of many frictions, France were essential members of NATO; the United States had no choice but to accept the two forces and the degree of independence demanded by the French. Effects on world political and military affairs could be classified, from an American standpoint, into three alternative but overlapping categories. The forces could be

- Unstable and destabilizing,
- Stable, or
- Useful.

Fortunately, during the cold war period real instability was never a problem. The French, under and after de Gaulle, sometimes talked wildly—*tous azimuts* was intended to imply that French weapons *could* be pointed to the west as well as the east, a theoretical possibility that nobody ever took seriously—but they acted quite responsibly. And the hidden fear, of Wohlstetter and many other Americans, that the Federal Republic of Germany would follow Britain and France in developing a national nuclear force, never came close to realization.

Rather than destabilization, the real question for the United States was whether the British and French forces could make a useful contribution to the shared objective considered by the United States to be second only to deterrence of attack on the United States itself—deterrence of Soviet attack on Western Europe. Were the two forces

merely nonnegative with regard to stability, or were they in fact what Nick Witney in his discussion of future options in Chapter One calls “a Blessing in Disguise” (BD)?

(Stability as such differs from Witney’s alternative to the “Blessing,” nuclear weapons as the “Ultimate Evil” (UE). Witney opposes UE as a philosophy for the future, but he admits to its possibility. During the cold war, however, most officials and analysts recognized not only the immutable existence of nuclear weapons, but their utility in deterring the Soviets. The “Ultimate Evil” viewpoint was held mainly by a few strong advocates of nuclear disarmament.)

In any case, the American answer to the question of utility versus mere stability during the cold war was that the British and French nuclear forces seemed to be useful—certainly politically, most likely psychologically (recognizing deterrence as a primarily psychological phenomenon), and perhaps even militarily.

- *Politically*, although it could be argued that a NATO as thoroughly dominated by the United States as it would have been without British and French nuclear weapons would have been in the American interest, that would be a rather dubious proposition. In any case, given that the two West European nuclear forces existed, the additional self-confidence that their forces provided to Britain and France strengthened the Alliance. The fact that both the forces remained associated with U.S. nuclear forces and policy, the British closely and explicitly, the French unofficially and more closely than had been known at the time,<sup>4</sup> meant that the two forces were never ubiquitously independent enough to disturb American policies or politics.
- *Psychologically*, even though the Soviets might have been militarily capable of any ultimate retaliation had Britain or France used their forces without U.S. backup, the possibility that such Soviet retaliation could invoke American strategic forces meant that the potential use of British or French nuclear weapons enhanced deterrence of any Soviet adventurism in Europe. Indeed,

<sup>4</sup>Richard H. Ullman’s “The Covert French Connection,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1989, has taken on the role of quasi-official exposé of the intimate French-American nuclear relationship.



the very uncertainty added by independent decision centers should have been cautionary. How strong a factor U.S. nuclear deterrence was in preventing the Soviet attack that never in fact took place, and how much the two additional nuclear forces might have added to that deterrence, must remain unknown and, indeed, immeasurable.

- *Militarily*, the case is more questionable. Acting independently, perhaps British or French forces could have accomplished the task of the *picadors* and *bandoleros* in a bullfight, weakening the bull to be finished off by the Strategic Air Command (SAC) as the *matador*. Perhaps not; it is highly unlikely that anyone ever planned out such a strategy. In any case, it seems doubtful that the two forces together could have added much of military significance to the overwhelming power of SAC.

Withal, the British and French nuclear forces in the cold war were most likely “useful” in the view of the United States. It is not clear that that carries over to the post-cold war era.

## THE FUTURE

The present and the future continue to be governed in large measure by the natural force that conditioned much of the past: inertia. By the mid-1960s, once the British and French decisions to build nuclear forces had been implemented, U.S. policy choices had to assume the continuation of those forces. Similarly now, the continued-existence decisions about future British and French forces have long since been made and the bulk of the costs have been incurred; the forces will continue to exist. But how will they be used? For the future as for the past, the central issue presented to the United States by British and French nuclear forces is whether they will be unstable and destabilizing, stable, or helpful in attaining U.S. objectives (which, so far as anyone can specify at this point, are objectives shared by the British and French themselves, as they were during the cold war).

The objectives themselves have of course changed in this new world. Rather than focusing on the fixed purpose of deterring Soviet attack on Western Europe, the United States may consider using the threat or conceivably even the tactical employment of nuclear weapons for

a more diffuse set of objectives. Most of these objectives have to do with nuclear weapons themselves—deterring the use of such weapons, particularly by small powers such as North Korea; to some extent deterring proliferation of their possession, although American nuclear force would be only an ultimate sanction in these cases; perhaps deterring the use or proliferation of other “weapons of mass destruction.” It is difficult to think of a use or a plausible threat of U.S. nuclear weapons for any lesser cause than these.

This paper by an American stresses these objectives as viewed by the United States. That NATO and other close ties with the nations of Western Europe remain central to American foreign policy is taken here as axiomatic (and thus needs no restatement). Continuing technical and other nuclear cooperation at current levels is also assumed. Nonetheless, now that the Alliance lacks the central common purpose of preventing Soviet attack on Western Europe, the objectives seen by the United States and by its allies may diverge more than in the past. To be sure, Britain and France share American anti-proliferation and anti-nuclear-use goals, but these are less concrete and geographically more widespread than stopping an attack across the Elbe. For Britain and France, as for the United States, the question then arises whether any other national interests might plausibly imply nuclear use against nonnuclear or at least non-mass-destruction threats. It would be destabilizing from an American point of view for the British or French to use their nuclear forces for such ends. Fortunately, however, it seems as improbable for Britain and France as for the United States that they would find such national interests for which their nuclear forces are relevant. That potential source of destabilization is likely to remain theoretical.

One possible exception to this dismissal of unintentional British and French destabilization, however, could stem from an objective shared not only by the United States, the UK, and France, but by Russia and China, the other two major nuclear powers as well—the prevention of further nuclear proliferation. A “moral” argument may be made—by x nation, none has actually made it—that if the British and French can possess small nuclear forces even after the end of their cold war needs, why not us? If one believes that such rhetorical arguments are likely to weigh significantly in the balance of x nation’s nuclear decisionmaking, as compared to x’s own perceived

national interest in obtaining nuclear weapons and its perception of the likelihood of punishment by the rest of the world for doing so, then such a “moral” consideration is relevant. But (a) putting great weight on “moral” as compared with “interest” factors is difficult to credit, and (b) the inertia argument providing special status to British and French (and U.S. and Russian and Chinese) nuclear forces is a strong one.

That British and French nuclear forces might become destabilizing factors is thus almost as unlikely now as during the cold war. Rather, the carryover issue is whether these forces will be, in the eyes of the United States, “merely stable” or actually useful.

However, one issue that was settled early in the cold war may have to be raised again: Are these forces likely to be politically supportable over a period of time? That is a question more of rationale—the public and political/military reasons for retaining nuclear capabilities. Political support of British and French nuclear forces is important to the United States as well as to the owners of those forces because, while inertia is likely to keep the forces in being in any case, crumbling support might at best dilute any usefulness they might have had, and at worst lead to a degree of instability.

The remainder of this discussion of the current and future world relies on this revised set of criteria—stability, utility, and internal supportability—to examine four alternative possible bases upon which Britain and France might rest the retention of their nuclear forces.

- *Inertia only.* Quiet dependence on the factors that will keep the forces in being, not worrying much about why.
- *General worldwide function.* Explicit public recognition that the nuclear forces may function politically and militarily anywhere in the world, but nobody can be sure in advance where. That implies waiting to see what develops, rather than taking advance steps specific to predicted crises.
- *European vocation.* A line of nuclear doctrine based primarily on a continued military and political function in Europe. This is largely the thrust of both the Witney and the Debouzy chapters in the report.

- *Specific worldwide function.* Taking conscious and public steps to use the forces for specified world objectives. One version of this, which would include British and French as well as U.S. nuclear forces, has been advocated elsewhere by the author of this paper.<sup>5</sup>

### Inertia Only

For three good reasons, British and French nuclear forces are unlikely to disappear in the near and mid-term future under almost any foreseeable circumstances. Indeed, the three reasons apply to U.S. forces as well.

- *Pure inertia.* As has been discussed, they're there because they're there because they're there. No magic wand will make nuclear weapons go away. The major decisions have been made by the British and the French, and the major costs incurred. It is politically and fiscally easy to keep them.
- *Everybody's doing it.* Why should Britain and France give up their nuclear forces when with a near certainty eight other nations (United States, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan) have nuclear weapons and another half dozen may or can? None of these seems to present a direct threat to British or French interests, but with that many weapons under that many centers of tight or loose control of nuclear forces, who can tell who may threaten what in the future?
- *Uncertainty.* This is the generalization of the previous point. The next two decades of world history may be as unpredictable as the last two turned out to be. (To be clear, the view of this paper is that uncertainties, in and of themselves, provide sufficient real reasons for retention of nuclear forces by the UK and France as well as the United States.)

The "Inertia only" posture, then, is based on the axiomatic nature of these three points: "Everybody knows these things," so why rock the boat by talking about them? In fact, British and French nuclear

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<sup>5</sup>Robert A. Levine, *Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use*, RAND, MR-231-CC, 1993.

forces are going to be talked about by somebody, in the pages of strategic and foreign policy journals if nowhere else, so it would take a degree of coolness on the part of officialdom to ignore the talk, but that is not implausible for the officials of either country. Planning for uncertainty could be low key—making reasonably sure that the weapons and delivery systems will work if called upon, making sure that a sufficient number of them are invulnerable to potential threats, and awaiting developments.

From a U.S. point of view, an “Inertia only” posture for British and French nuclear forces is likely to be quite stable and potentially useful under circumstances in which American nuclear forces become relevant to policy—but with no advance guarantees from the UK or France. And so far as the internal supportability of this posture is concerned, one must decide whether the old fable applies here: Does not talking about it imply that nobody wants to admit to observing a naked ruler—there is no real need for these nuclear capabilities; or in this case, are the emperors of Britain and France really clad in comfortably imperial suits of clothes—nuclear forces provide a valuable hedge against uncertainties?

### General Worldwide Function

Operationally, this comes close to “Inertia only,” except that in this case, officials as well as analysts would be willing, perhaps eager, to talk about it. The posture would draw heavily and explicitly on the fact that “everybody’s doing it” in different parts of the globe; and it would state clearly the belief that Britain and France live in a chancy world in which their existing nuclear forces provide a guard against definitionally unpredictable uncertainties, including nuclear uncertainties.

Such a posture could come relatively easily for France because the spirit of *tous azimuts*, not to mention the penchant for abstract Cartesian discourse, has led to the casting of explicit nuclear doctrine, even during the cold war, in terms of common rather than proper nouns—“the enemy” rather than the Soviets. That is reflected in Olivier Debouzy’s paper (Chapter Two), which is concrete about France’s nuclear relations with the rest of Europe, particularly Britain, but is much less specific about against whom national or

joint nuclear operations might be directed. This fits neatly into a "General worldwide" posture.

Like "Inertia only," a British and French "General worldwide" posture seems quite stable, and for the United States potentially useful, but still without guarantees. The choice between these first two postures is likely to be based largely on consideration of internal politics in the two nations: Uncertainty seems to provide a valid reason for retention of nuclear forces; would it provide a sufficient public rationale? Or might so explicit a debate unnecessarily endanger the long-run continued existence of these capabilities?

For Britain, the answer may lie in the fact that debate is ordinarily open on any such issue, so the argument might as well be joined by proponents of a "General worldwide" function for nuclear weapons. For France, quiet "Inertia only" might help preserve the historical foreign policy consensus, but, as Debouzy points out, unprecedented nuclear debate may be fracturing that consensus in any case, so perhaps explicitness has become the best policy.

### European Vocation

Unlike the first two alternatives, a European vocation as the rationale for retaining British and French nuclear forces can provide a concrete basis for nuclear planning: *something* is going to threaten Western Europe from the east or the south—something Russian, Ukrainian, Iranian, Libyan, or Algerian; what role can nuclear forces play in deterring or defeating it? We can think about that just as we thought about specific military threats to Western Europe during the cold war.

And concreteness is not the only virtue of the European Vocation. It is also familiar; the old issues can be picked up from where they were, no need to start all over again. Indeed, as a particular and particularly important subcase of familiar issues, discussion can continue on potential grounds for nuclear cooperation between the UK and France, as proposed by Debouzy and Witney. The overall discussion would then relate closely to parallel consideration of the future roles and architectures of NATO, WEU, etc. Insofar as the notional threat is from the east, as in the past, an important desidera-

tum will be the need to engender sufficient German confidence to preclude any German effort to obtain nuclear weapons.

All this would encompass a familiar set of issues which would necessarily bring in the United States, by inclusion or exception. Such familiarity is not a trivial virtue, because Alliance architecture is not a trivial issue. As Debouzy contends, reconsideration of the roles of the British and French nuclear forces may be very useful in engendering desirable reconstruction of both the European and transatlantic connections of NATO.

The difficulty with the European Vocation begins to show through here, however, in the familiarity itself. The European Vocation is not really about Iran, Libya, or Algeria; these are potentially real subcases of the "General worldwide" posture. The European Vocation is, as it always has been, about the threat from the east, the only threat that could make conceivable a German decision to build nuclear weapons, the only threat against which NATO has ever found common ground.

But what if the old threat really isn't there? True, Eastern Europe raises important problems for the West: uncontrollable immigration and economies that require assistance but also threaten to compete with weak western economic sectors are real issues. These threats, however, are not ones against which nuclear capabilities could possibly come into play. Internal instability and tensions, particularly between Russia and a still-nuclear Ukraine, might somehow raise security issues to which British and French nuclear forces, and German nuclear fears, would be relevant. But (a) it is very difficult to conceive of such scenarios, and (b) if one were written, it would be so different from those of the cold war that the attractive concreteness, and indeed the realism, of the European Vocation could turn out to be quite illusory. The Witney and Debouzy papers deal much more, and much more comfortably, with the potential desirable effects within Western Europe of a European Vocation for the British and French forces than they do with the possibly evanescent threats from outside Western Europe for which those forces might be relevant.

None of this demonstrates that the European Vocation cannot continue as a satisfactory theme for British and for French nuclear

forces, or for the bringing together of the two forces in some model of intensive or extensive cooperation. If it works, it is satisfactory.

From an American point of view, a European Vocation for European nuclear forces would be stable, as it has been for these many years. Indeed, under the Clinton administration, the traditional American suspicion of purely European moves within NATO or parallel to NATO may be fading. If so, British-French nuclear cooperation may be welcomed. Even though the United States might still not consider the European Vocation to be useful *per se*, it should be no worse than would be the British and French forces under “Inertia only” or “General worldwide” postures.

The real question in fact is not the utility to the United States of the European Vocation, but its viability—the Vocation as a rationale for continued internal support in the United Kingdom and France. If this emperor really has no clothes—if the design mission for the two forces is not believable—then somebody might notice, just about the time when new expenditures, new delivery systems, and new tests become a real necessity.

### Specific Worldwide Function

Suppose that the United States, Britain, and France—presumably led by the United States as the owner of much the largest nuclear force—could find a common function for their forces. The author of this chapter has elsewhere suggested such a function, an announced policy of deterrence of first use of nuclear weapons by anyone,<sup>6</sup> but as a political possibility, in the United States as well as elsewhere, that policy may be a figment of his imagination. Even so, *some* such common American/British/French—and perhaps even Russian and Chinese—purpose could provide a strong and continuing rationale for nuclear forces.

Two virtues of such a common purpose and rationale are that (a) unlike either “Inertia only” or a “General worldwide” function, it would be concrete; and (b) unlike the European Vocation, it would be real. The three Western nuclear powers, and Russia and probably China,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



do share one crucial objective for which nuclear weapons are relevant—*that nobody else use them*.

The proposal for Uniform Deterrence (UD) of First Use specified the explicit threat of punishment—nonnuclear if possible, nuclear if necessary—for any nation using nuclear weapons for any purpose other than to retaliate for their use. For reasons explained in MR-231-CC, “using nuclear weapons” meant “using,” not “possessing”; and it meant nuclear weapons, not other “weapons of mass destruction.” The proposer, promulgator, and primary guarantor of UD would of course be the United States, but for clear political reasons, the policy would be possible only with the cooperation at least of America’s allies and preferably of Russia and China as well.

Witney’s chapter suggests that UD would require a much firmer commitment than the United Kingdom would be willing to make, and indeed, the discussion in the report making the initial proposal admitted that, at least at this time, it might be too firm for the United States as well. The concept was intended primarily to suggest a longer-range direction rather than an immediate possibility. Nonetheless, moving in this direction, perhaps with a less traumatic, less committing, policy, would have a number of attractive features:

- *The problem is real.* Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction exist and the magic wand to make them go away does not. Whatever one thinks of the responsibility of those who currently control such weapons, it is possible or even likely that they will fall into the hands of those considered irresponsible. The problems raised are ones to which nuclear forces under responsible control are clearly relevant.
- *It may be the only real, relevant, and concrete problem.* Nobody has come up with any other specific purpose for nuclear forces that fits all three of these adjectives.
- *It is perceived in common as a major problem,* at least by the United States, Britain, and France, almost certainly by Russia, and probably by China.
- *A policy of this nature would strengthen Western ties.*
- *It would make British and French nuclear forces useful and even necessary in American eyes.*

- *Such a real rationale should strengthen internal support for nuclear forces in the United Kingdom and France.*

But all this too may be a figment.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Nuclear weapons and forces are not going to go away in the foreseeable future, certainly not U.S. nuclear weapons and forces, nor British and French weapons and forces.
2. British and French nuclear forces are likely to be, at worst, “merely stabilizing”; at best, useful for shared world objectives.
3. Because of inertia if for no other reason, British and French nuclear forces are not going to go away, not in any nearby future.
4. To strengthen inertia, several courses are possible. They are not mutually exclusive, which is a good thing, because none of them is perfect:
  - A “General worldwide” posture, explicitly set forth. This would admit, and indeed depend upon, uncertainty. It may be a useful direction, depending on whether such explicitness would strengthen or erode internal support within Britain and France.
  - A European Vocation. It is familiar and easy to work with, but it may not be real any more, and it could disappear under scrutiny.
  - A “Specific worldwide” function, held in common by the United States, the UK, and France. Such an anti-nuclear/mass destruction, anti-use/proliferation purpose would be real, but it might not be realistic.

Fortunately, inertia makes it unnecessary for Britain and France to make any immediate choices among postures or rationales, or combinations thereof. Near-term decisions may have to be made concerning testing, but it seems likely that the British and French (and the Americans) will look for technical ways to minimize the need for testing rather than political rationales for resuming it. Also in the near term, even more important decisions may be called for, con-

cerning what to do about nuclear threats from North Korea, or Iraq, or Iran. Such national and international decisions are likely to be made on specific current grounds rather than long-run rationales; if anything, once made, the immediate decisions will direct future postures, rather than the reverse.

Also current is the 1995 conference on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the implementation of its outcomes. Insofar as British and French forces are concerned, here too inertia is likely to govern. Forces that have existed for forty years are not defined as "proliferation." Britain and France and the United States will continue to treat proliferators as the other guys, and are likely to continue to get away with it because the rest of the world has little choice and "moral" arguments have little strength.

Perhaps it would be best, after all, to fall back entirely upon inertia. But that might leave too many analysts unemployed.

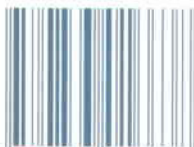








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